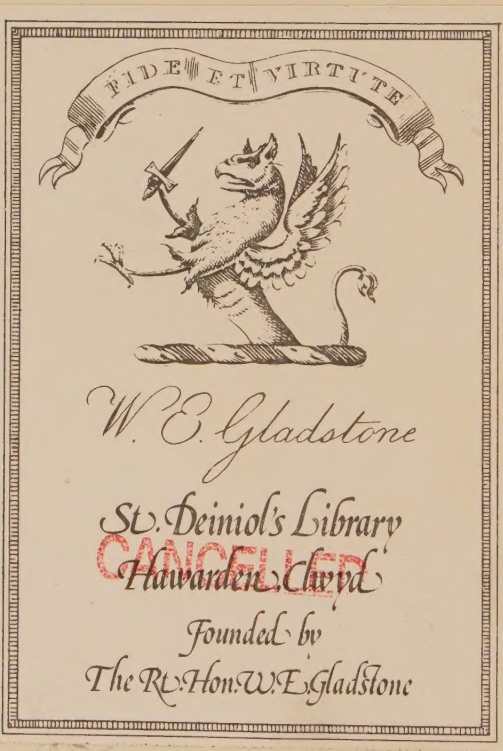
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FROM THEOSOPHY TO CHRISTIAN FAITH

A COMPARISON OF THEOSOPHY WITH CHRISTIANITY

BY
E. R. McNEILE

WITH A PREFACE
BY THE
RIGHT REV. CHARLES GORE, D.D.
LATE BISHOP OF OXFORD

'How know we the way?'
'I am the way.'

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.
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PREFACE

By the Bishop of Oxford

This book was first written, I think, at my suggestion; and, when the first draft seemed to me to assume much too much knowledge of Theosophy on the part of the general public, was at my request in part rewritten. I cannot, therefore, resist the invitation that I should seek by a preface to introduce it to the public.

Its special value lies in the experience on which it is based. Some of us are repelled by Theosophy. But there are many people, in England and America, as well as in India, who are attracted by it; and the writer of this book should appeal to them as one who felt the attraction so deeply as to pass into 'the inner school.' Thus she writes with the authority of experience about Theosophy. But the attraction which drew her into it did not avail to keep her there. Like S. Augustine in his similar relation to Manichaeism, she found herself disappointed and disillusioned. When she came to examine the teaching she had received

in the 'inner school,' she found its claims ill-grounded, its profession of scientific insight into nature unwarranted by any results, its probable influence rather evil than good, and the mastery which it claimed over the minds of its disciples paralysing to all the instincts of freedom and impartiality. So she passed out of it. And the void which Theosophy had left, she found to be more and more filled by the Catholic Faith, in which she has found her permanent home. All this gives her the claim to describe Theosophy and compare it with the Christian Faith; and, if I may judge others by myself, her book will be found profoundly interesting and, in its main lines, convincing.

A few slight corrections—mostly enclosed in square brackets—have at my request been introduced by the Editor in England. The author wrote the book when she was in India: had she been in England, there are one or two passages which I should have ventured to ask her to reconsider. But, if they are open to criticism, the criticism would not come near to touching the argument of the book, which seems to me to be sound throughout. Thus if critics, more or less exactly acquainted with the various schools of ancient Gnosticism, are disposed to think that the authoress has grouped them together too closely as 'one system,' and attributed to all ideas or doctrines which only belong to some, I

think they must acknowledge that the main contention of Chapter VII—that modern Theosophy finds a close parallel in ancient Gnosticism—is fully justified.

It is therefore with great confidence that I commend this study of Theosophy in contrast, point by point, with the Catholic Faith—this which is no abstract study, but grounded in an experience of Theosophy from within—to all those of every land who are attracted, or have to do with others who are attracted, by a recurrent type of teaching, which now again to-day is claiming the attention and homage of men.

C. OXON:

CUDDESDON.
Epiphany, 1919.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THIS little book is mainly addressed to Theosophists, or to those whose minds are turning towards Theosophy in the expectation of finding there either a plausible explanation of some of the great problems of existence, or else that satisfaction of their aspirations after a spiritual order in the unseen which they have failed to find in Christianity. It is not a theological work, it has no originality, nor does it pretend to be an exposition of the Christian Faith as a whole: rather it is an attempt to draw attention to certain elements of the Christian Faith which are frequently overlooked by Theosophists, and for lack of which hasty and erroneous conclusions are drawn as to what Christianity really is. It often happens that a person, born and bred a Christian, assumes that he must of necessity know all about Christianity; while, as a matter of fact, he has never all his life had more than certain selections from the Faith put before him. Such a person, let us say, is an eager inquirer after truth, he is also something of a mystic, he is vaguely conscious of certain parts of his being which have hitherto met with no recognition and no satisfaction, and which are being starved till the process has become positively painful. He sees nothing in Christianity,

arbitrary and monotonous as it appears to him, that offers the least hope of satisfying his craving; and Theosophy attracts him as directed precisely towards this very end. He has never made any profound study of Christianity, and never dreamed of submitting to its discipline or placing himself under the instruction of some competent teacher; but he lightly throws off what little hold it had upon him, and applies himself with quite a new seriousness to the study of Theosophy. In this new environment he gradually becomes a receptive and docile pupil; and if he perseveres, he sooner or later places himself under a mental direction so exacting that what he shall think or what he shall believe, on almost every subject, is decided for him by others. When this stage is reached, it is difficult to take an unbiassed view of anything, and a just appreciation of what Christianity really is becomes peculiarly difficult.

It is believed that many persons are passing through such an experience as this at the present time; and it is in the hope that some may accept the suggestion to make a careful inquiry as to the price that must be paid, if Christianity is to be exchanged for Theosophy, that this little book is written.

It was at first intended to assume some knowledge of Theosophy on the part of the readers, and therefore to give no account of it; but it was considered that this would render the book unintelligible to some who might otherwise make use of it: so I have added the first chapter containing a summary of those elements of Theosophy which

come under the category of religion. With the rest of the teaching, Christianity is not concerned: it comes under the scope of the various sciences. Up to the promulgation of the cult of Alcyone, which took place after I left the Society, I speak from first-hand knowledge of what is taught and believed among Theosophists, and not only from study of the literature; and in a later chapter, I also speak from experience of the effect of the system upon the mind. It is probably seldom that religious convictions are much affected by argument, and Theosophists are peculiarly impervious to such approach. What can and does change the whole mental outlook is personal contact with the Lord Christ. As long as He is only known by hearsay, one description may perhaps do as well as another, and the mind that is sufficiently 'psychologised'—as Mme Blavatsky used to call it—may be willing to believe whatever Theosophic teachers are pleased to say about Him; but genuine personal acquaintance with Him—whether it comes in a sudden vision or steals more gradually upon the soul—dispels all the mist of phantasy for ever. The soul that has seen Him, and knows His love, can never again believe the tangled tales about Him that seemed quite credible before. It is personal contact with Christ that ultimately brings conviction of the fallacy of Theosophy, not any trench warfare of argument assailing it statement by statement.

E. R. McNEILE.

S. Mary's Home,
Wantage.
June 1919.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
	PREFACE BY THE BISHOP OF OXFORD	v
	AUTHOR'S PREFACE	ix
I.	THE RELIGION OF THEOSOPHY	1
II.	GNOSTICISM	16
III.	THEOSOPHIC EVIDENCES	32
IV.	ONE GOD THE FATHER	57
V.	THE LOGOS	69
VI.	THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS	83
VII.	THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH	99
VIII.	THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS	113
IX.	THE MYSTIC WAY	126
	APPENDIX	143

FROM THEOSOPHY TO CHRISTIAN FAITH

CHAPTER I

THE RELIGION OF THEOSOPHY

THE term Theosophy, in the modern sense of the word, is a highly comprehensive one. It 'may be described to the outside world,' according to one of its chief exponents, 'as an intelligent theory of the universe.' It is claimed that there exists, and has existed for untold ages, a body of supermen, adepts, initiates, the Brotherhood of the Great White Lodge (they are known by various names), who are possessed of all knowledge on every subject. Such knowledge includes cosmology, ethnology, the physical sciences, and all that range of subjects commonly associated with the term religion. From time to time, some parts of this knowledge have been revealed to such men as were found developed enough to receive it. The ancient mysteries were systems by which the chosen few were initiated into this secret wisdom; and there have always been individuals in various nations who have possessed some part of the knowledge and have handed on the tradition.

Some forty years ago, the Great Brotherhood decided that the time had come for a fresh and

fuller revelation, and certain of their members were entrusted with this task. These members selected Mme Blavatsky for their first disciple, and through her and Col. Olcott they founded the Theosophical Society. They are known to Theosophists as 'the Masters.' The teaching of Theosophy, therefore, consists of information either directly imparted by them, or acquired with their help, or by the methods indicated by them. A belief in the Masters is fundamental to Theosophy.

It is further claimed that the patient inquirer, who is willing to go through the necessary training and to take the necessary trouble, may learn to verify the statements made to him, and go on to acquire further information of the same kind himself. 'It is entirely a question of vibration.' Under ordinary conditions, we are only sensitive to a very small proportion of the vibrations passing through the universe. 'If a man is able to make himself sensitive to additional vibrations, he will acquire additional information: he will become what is commonly called clairvoyant.'[1] It is believed that every event that has ever happened has set up certain vibrations, which it is still possible for the trained observer to intercept. They constitute what are called the akashic records.[2] Certain leaders of the Theosophic Society—notably Mrs. Besant and Mr. Leadbeater—have been so trained; and their readings of the records, even when directly opposed to the results of ordinary scientific research,

[1] C. W. Leadbeater, *An Outline of Theosophy*, p. 10.
[2] *Vide ibid.*, p. 73; and *Clairvoyance*, p. 88.

constitute infallible information for those who really credit the system.

A great deal of the teaching of Theosophy is concerned with religious subjects : so much so, that it may be said to include a complete religious system ; and it is this aspect of it that constitutes a challenge to Christianity. It is claimed that the teaching embodied in this system is the absolute truth that underlies all religions. The exoteric religions have their origin in certain fragments of the truth revealed by a great World Teacher ; but these fragments have in many cases been misunderstood, and distorted almost past recognition. It is the function of Theosophy to give the true meaning of the partial revelations, and to re-interpret Christianity to Christians, Hinduism to Hindus, and Buddhism to Buddhists. It is not admitted that Theosophy conflicts with Christianity ; but rather any Christian doctrine that conflicts with Theosophy is a mistaken deduction from the original revelation, and not a part of true esoteric Christianity at all. This position leads to rather bewildering forms of argument, and it will be the endeavour of the following pages to show how far Theosophy conflicts with the Christian Faith : not as it is believed by Theosophists that it might or ought to have been, but as it is in itself—that is, as revealed by Our Lord, taught by the Apostles, and gradually apprehended by the Catholic Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

To facilitate comparison, it is necessary to review

in very brief outline the teaching of Theosophy on religious subjects; but this brings us up at once against a familiar difficulty which is almost invariably advanced by Theosophists when discussion approaches controversy. It is stated that there is no dogma in Theosophy, and no Theosophist is under obligation to believe any given doctrine—a statement which is designed to cut the ground from under any attack made upon any part of the teaching. Whatever doctrine is called in question, the answer is always ready—that such doctrine is no essential part of Theosophy, and to discredit it is in no way to discredit Theosophy itself.

In view of this statement, it is important to remember that there are many degrees among the adherents of Theosophy, who vary from those who take a friendly and casual interest in the subject, and have some slight acquaintance with its literature, to those who are deeply embued with its teaching, are disciples in the inner school, and are pledged to uttermost loyalty to the Head of the school: the adherents vary, in short, from the dilettante to the initiate or the aspirant to initiation. The claim that Theosophy has no dogma may possibly hold good in the case of the former: it is not made, and cannot possibly be made, in the case of the latter; and the statement is therefore apt to be misleading when made, with mental reservation, before the general public, who are possibly not even aware of the existence of the inner school, and certainly not of its obligations. This question

of the binding nature of the tenets of Theosophy upon its disciples will be referred to again in a late chapter. I speak from experience. I have been admitted to the inner school by Mrs. Besant herself, and I do not think that anyone will contradict me when I say that there is a considerable body of beliefs which no genuine and convinced Theosophist would dream of disputing—which, indeed, it would be disloyalty to the Society and to the chosen mouthpiece of the Masters to venture to call in question. Some of these beliefs I will attempt briefly to summarise. They are to be found explicitly and confidently offered for acceptance not only in the earlier literature, but in the writings of Mrs. Besant and Mr. Leadbeater, the most authoritative living exponents of Theosophy.

The Nature of God.—The Supreme Being, or rather the Supreme Existence, is impersonal, unknown, and unknowable. 'Of the Absolute, the Infinite, the All-embracing, we can at our present stage know nothing, except that It is; we can say nothing that is not a limitation and therefore inaccurate.'[1] Below this is a lesser God, a demiurge. 'Each solar system is the expression of a mighty Being whom we call the Logos, the Word of God, the Solar Deity. He is to it all that men mean by God.'[2] The Logos contains in itself an inherent Trinity, consisting of Will, Wisdom, Activity; the origin alike of the Christian, Hindu, and various other doctrines of a Trinity, though, to be complete,

[1] Leadbeater, *Textbook of Theosophy.*
[2] *Ibid.*

the three should be associated with a fourth—a feminine power—and thus become a quaternary.[1] Below this Solar Deity comes a great Hierarchy of spiritual beings: first the seven Planetary Spirits, and then the Angels or Devas, identified with the many gods of polytheistic systems. In charge of this planet are two great Officials of the Hierarchy: the Ruler, or Lawgiver, or Manu, who guides the outer evolution of humanity, and his Brother the World-Teacher, who gives a religion to each great root-race in turn.[2] The Adepts, or the Masters, mentioned above, are highly developed pupils of the World Teacher, who themselves have become teachers of mankind. It is the supreme ambition of the Theosophic neophyte to discover which of these great ones is his own appointed Master, to be admitted to contact with him, and at last to be received as a candidate for initiation at his hands. It is not given to man while still bound to incarnation to come into personal relations with any higher being than a Master; though at the same time the whole Hierarchy, up to the Supreme Impersonal One Itself, may be discovered and their existence verified by the expert who has learnt to respond to the vibrations of the 'subtler matter.' 'To the trained and clairvoyant investigator this Mighty Existence is a definite certainty.'[3] But it is a certainty of observation, not of personal relationship.

[1] Mrs. Besant, *Ancient Wisdom.*
[2] *Ibid.*, and *The Immediate Future.*
[3] Leadbeater, *Outline of Theosophy*, p. 25.

The Nature of Man.—Man is 'an emanation from the Logos, a spark of the Divine fire.' [1] But 'that which came forth from the Divine was not yet man—not yet even a spark; for there was no developed individualisation in it. It was simply a cloud of Divine Essence, though capable of condensing eventually into many sparks.' [2] This divine nebula first passes by a process of involution into association with the various types of matter. Of these, seven are enumerated; varying from pure spiritual, through mental, astral, etheric, to dense physical matter on the lowest plane. Then comes the twin process of evolution; and 'investigations into the past . . . show the Divine Life rising from kingdom to kingdom, through the mineral, the vegetable, the animal, until it reaches the human, and thus binding them all together into one common brotherhood.' [3] The divine spark, when it reaches the stage of humanity, clothes itself with successive vehicles or bodies drawn from the matter of each plane—spiritual, astral, etheric,-down to the physical. These bodies interpenetrate one another as the subtler matter interpenetrates the grosser. The higher ones are at first nebulous and inchoate. Man's progress consists in the gradual development and organisation of them, so that he learns to respond to ever subtler vibrations and to function on ever higher planes of matter. 'It is entirely a question of

[1] Leadbeater, *Outline of Theosophy*, p. 38.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 77.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 74.

vibration.' 'All matter is in essence the same; . . . physical matter may become astral, or astral may become mental, if only it be sufficiently subdivided, and caused to vibrate with the proper degree of rapidity.' [1] After countless ages, the man becomes an Adept, 'capable of himself developing into a Logos.' The end is absorption into the Divine Essence from which he emanated: 'the dewdrop slips into the shining sea.' [2]

In such a system as this there is no room for the idea of sin. What seem like temptations to evil are really only the downward pull of the grosser material of the outer vehicles. The matter of which they are composed is 'at a stage of evolution much earlier than our own. . . . The tendency is always to press downwards toward the grosser material and the coarser vibrations which mean progress for it, but retrogression for us; and so it happens that the interest of the true man sometimes comes into collision with that of the living matter in some of his vehicles.' [3] Thus is the whole problem of evil summarily disposed of, or at least deprived of its moral aspect.

Re-incarnation.—The evolutionary progress of the human soul is by means of successive incarnations. Broadly speaking, the Hindu doctrine of re-incarnation has been taken over by Theosophy, but with the important modification that a man can never be reborn as anything lower than a

[1] Leadbeater, *Outline of Theosophy*, p. 38.
[2] *Vide* Leadbeater, *Textbook*, and *Outline*; and Mrs. Besant, *Ancient Wisdom*, and *Birth and Evolution of the Soul*, *passim*.
[3] Leadbeater, *Outline of Theosophy*, p. 56.

man. The monad or divine spark, clothed in vestures taken from the matter of the three highest planes, constitutes the human soul, a trinity reflecting the trinity of the Logos. This soul or ego, through the experiences of the earth-life, gradually develops its latent qualities, and so proceeds on its upward path. But the lessons learned in a single life are so infinitesimal, compared with the stupendous progress of the whole career, that countless incarnations are necessary, and the soul must return again and again to what is practically an endless series of rebirths. Each time death takes place, the ego slips off the outer sheath or body. It then passes on to the astral plane, and when the necessary experiences there are exhausted the astral body is in turn slipped off, and the ego passes on to the mental plane, which is the original of the Christian conception of heaven. The length of his stay on each plane is determined by 'the causes which he himself had generated during his earth-life,'[1] and when these causes are exhausted, he returns to incarnation. For the average man the period between incarnations is usually some 1500 to 2000 years, but in special cases this may be much shortened. Mme Blavatsky is said to have been re-incarnated almost immediately after her death.

Karma.[2]—The twin doctrines of *karma* and

[1] Leadbeater, *Outline of Theosophy*, p. 71.

[2] *N.B.*—The *r* is clearly pronounced, and the *a* is like the English *u* in cut ; distinguish between *karma* = action, and *kama*, also a Sanskrit word, = desire.

re-incarnation have been taken over together by Theosophy from Hinduism. The word *karma* is a Sanskrit one, meaning, literally, action ; but in Hinduism it has become a technical term meaning also the fruits of action, and denoting a law of cause and effect by which every action generates fresh action and must inevitably work itself out to the end, if not in this life then in another. There is no escaping the law of *karma*. It governs alike all that a man does and all that happens to him throughout his life, whether incarnate or discarnate. Thus the circumstances of a man's birth are the direct result of his actions in a former life. If he is born diseased or defective, or in the midst of poverty or crime, it is the just recompense of his former evil deeds ; while the man of noble disposition, great ability, or high position, has won all these advantages entirely by his own former merits. 'We ourselves alone are responsible.' There is a terrible loneliness about this system by which each man makes and pursues his own solitary fate ; no room is left for corporate suffering or corporate progress or, indeed, for corporate life in any form. It is a remarkable fact that Theosophists, while adopting this teaching from Hinduism, and approving it as the only possible solution of the problem of pain, and as the only way of escape from the necessity of imputing injustice to the divine ordering of the universe, and while insisting on it throughout as of primary importance, yet shrink from going the whole way with Hinduism and following the doctrine to its logical conclusion.

The doctrine of *karma* in Hinduism is pitilessly and unflinchingly logical. This works itself out in two directions. First, since all suffering is the result of evil done in a former life, a sufferer is something akin to a criminal. For instance, a widow must of necessity have been guilty of serious sin in a former life: it is therefore right and proper to treat her as an object of contempt and aversion. She must spend her life in cruel fastings and privations, and is liable to bring ill-luck on all with whom she associates. Secondly, the law of *karma* is inexorable. If a man is born an outcaste or a leper, or if he falls into some great calamity, he has brought it on himself; and since his *karma* must work itself out, it is useless or worse to try to help him. The outcaste may possibly be born in caste next time, but for the present his condition is his *karma*: it is unnecessary to minister to the leper; it is his *karma* to suffer. This is orthodox Hinduism, as believed and practised in India to-day; but the English Theosophist, brought up in a Christian atmosphere and impregnated with Christian ethical standards, stops short of the logical deductions from his own premises. 'Every one with whom we are brought into contact is a soul who may be helped,'[1] says Mr. Leadbeater; but in order to say it, he must abandon the very doctrine of *karma* on which he and all Theosophists so much insist.

This point of the widespread influence of Christian ethics should continually be borne in mind in the study of Theosophy. As at present

[1] Leadbeater, *Outline of Theosophy*, p. 97.

set forth, the latter is under a great and unacknowledged debt to the teaching of Jesus and the moral standards of Christianity ; for by these it is saved from descending to the dark depths that are to be found in other (non-Christian) systems, while all the time the Person of Jesus and the claims of Christianity are vehemently and explicitly repudiated.

The Person of Christ.—How explicit is this repudiation, the following summary of the teaching with regard to the Person of Christ will make abundantly clear.[1]

Mention has been made of the great World-Teacher, who gives a religion to each successive race of mankind. The first such World-Teacher presided, as Vyasa, over the inception of the ancient Aryan religion : again, he was known as Thoth, or Hermes, to the ancient Egyptians ; as Zoroaster to the Iranians ; and as Orpheus to the Greeks. He appeared for the last time as the Buddha, and then passed away from men. His place was taken by his Brother, the World-Teacher of to-day, ' the Lord Maitreya, whom Christians call the Christ.' He is the Lord of Love, as the Buddha was the Lord of Wisdom. He is known in India as Sri Krishna. ' For when the Indian worships Shrî Kṛṣhṇa, unknowingly he is worshipping One in whom the Christ is incarnate.' [2] It may be mentioned in passing, that the Hindu legends of

[1] *Vide* Mrs. Besant, *Esoteric Christianity, The Immediate Future, The Changing World.*

[2] Mrs. Besant, *The Immediate Future,* p. 32.

Krishna represent him as utterly immoral, and his worship at the present time is one of the most impure cults in India.

The World-Teacher came again among the Jews, for the Teuton race, in a different manner. A man called Jesus was born in Bethlehem of human parents, in 105 B.C. He was an advanced disciple of the Great Ones, and an initiate into the Ancient Mysteries among the Essenes. For three years the World-Teacher, the Christ, took possession of the body of this disciple, and used it to teach and preach and found a religion. 'There was a difference between the human body of the mighty disciple Jesus, born in Bethlehem, and the divine power that came down upon that body at the point of time marked as the Baptism, when it is written, "The Spirit of God came down upon him and abode with him"; there you have the Coming of the Christ, the consecration of the Supreme Teacher.'[1] 'The man Jesus yielded himself a willing sacrifice, 'offered himself without spot" to the Lord of Love, who took unto Himself the pure form as tabernacle, and dwelt therein for three years of mortal life.'[2] This part of the theory will be recognised by students of Church history as the same with that of the docetic heresies. The account of the historic crucifixion is described as the result of later misunderstandings, whereby the Cross, the symbol of a great cosmic sacrifice, 'became materialised into an actual death by crucifixion,' and the story

[1] Mrs. Besant, *The Changing World*, p. 147.
[2] Mrs. Besant, *Esoteric Christianity*, p. 133.

'was attached to the Divine Teacher, Jesus.'[1] This same 'Jesus' was subsequently re-incarnated as Apollonios of Tyana, and in this character attained to final initiation.

This doctrine of the World-Teacher, as the Christ, has been given forth gradually, and within the last few years has advanced to further developments. In 1911, in a course of lectures delivered in London under the title of 'The Coming Christ,' Mrs. Besant announced that the Supreme Teacher would 'again, ere long, be incarnate upon earth, again made manifest as Teacher, again walking and living amongst us as He walked in Palestine.'[2] For this purpose he would again require for his use the body of a disciple, and it was announced in India that the choice had fallen on a young Madrasi named Krishnamurti, otherwise known by his *nom de plume* of Alcyone.[3] This young man was brought forward at Benares as 'the chosen of the Lord Maitreya,' and for a time was worshipped as divine at the Central Hindu College—the College founded by Mrs. Besant at Benares. The Order of the Star in the East was founded to prepare the way for the coming of the Great One, and had a rapid vogue among Christians in England before it was understood that at the coming of Christ the young man Krishnamurti should take the place formerly taken by Jesus of Nazareth. The organisation of the Order of the Star in the East

[1] Mrs. Besant, *Esoteric Christianity*, p. 183.
[2] Mrs. Besant, *The Changing World*, p. 153.
[3] *Vide The Theosophist* for February 1912, and *passim*.

is distinct from that of the Theosophical Society, and it is said that individual Theosophists are not obliged to accept the cult of Alcyone; but Mrs. Besant is official 'Protector' of the Order, and for the inner circle her pronouncement of the rôle assigned to Alcyone is all sufficient.

CHAPTER II

GNOSTICISM

MODERN Theosophy exhibits so many of the features of second-century Gnosticism that some knowledge of the latter is necessary for a proper appreciation of the former. Much in the theology of Theosophy that appears new and startling at the present time is really only a reproduction of doctrines that were advanced and discussed, and gradually abandoned, many centuries ago. Theological doctrines may gradually lose their hold on the human mind for more than one reason; it may be that they do not contain enough truth to retain their hold, so that when the novelty wears off the attraction fails also; or, on the other hand, it may be that men have failed to make the necessary moral response which the Truth demands, and have thus lost for the time their power to perceive the Truth. In the former case, to revive the doctrine is to pursue a will-o'-the-wisp and court disillusionment; in the latter, it may be to regain lost ground and so to prepare the way for solid advance. The Truth does not change, though our apprehension of it does. It behoves the prudent man to make cautious

inquiry as to which process has been at work when he receives an invitation to 'the rediscovery of forgotten truths.'

Gnosticism is a term applied to the tenets of a considerable number of religious sects, which arose in the first and second centuries of the Christian era, or a little earlier, and which attempted to engraft certain Oriental doctrines first on Judaism and later on Christianity. These doctrines were concerned with cosmological speculations about creation and the origin of the material world, and they involved a belief in a hierarchy of intermediary beings, and also a belief that matter is the source of evil. Of Judaic Gnosticism little definite information is forthcoming; but there can be little doubt that the peculiar doctrines of the Essenes —a recluse ascetic Community among the Jews, inhabiting the neighbourhood of the Dead Sea— were of this type, and that a similar blend of Orientalism with Judaism is to be found in the 'Colossian heresy,' the spread of which among the Christians of the first century at Colossae called forth S. Paul's epistle to that Church. The term '*gnosis*' was by this time already in use, but the expression Gnosticism is more commonly applied to the blend with Christianity of a somewhat later date. The doctrines of the various Gnostic sects are not identical one with another, but are sufficiently related to be considered as a single system. The term '*gnosis*,' or knowledge, was applied by the leaders of the sects themselves to the substance of their teaching on the assumption that they were in possession

of secret sources of information, which enabled them to dispense with ordinary methods of inquiry, and gave to their systems a special quality of absolute knowledge.

The earliest form of 'Christian' Gnosticism is usually ascribed to Simon Magus of Samaria, whose brief association with Christianity is described in the book of the Acts of the Apostles (chap. viii.). It subsequently developed into a multitude of sects in Syria, was transplanted into Alexandria in the second century, and there gave rise to the celebrated varieties of *gnosis* associated with the names of Basilides, Valentinus, and Carpocrates. Valentinus also taught and gathered disciples in Rome; and in Rome, too, the still more famous Marcion established a community. With the exception of Marcion, to whom we will return later, it is unnecessary to discuss the differences between the various sects. Certain main doctrines were common to them all, and they characterise what we call Gnosticism.

The great and permanent problem of the existence of evil was at that time before men's minds with a peculiar insistence, and coupled with this was the further problem of creation and the nature of the Creator. What is the ultimate origin of evil, and who is responsible for it? In what part of creation and of human nature does it essentially inhere? What remedy is or can be provided? These were some of the questions which the Gnostics, with the great intellect of an intellectual age, set themselves to answer. They had before them, as

material upon which to draw, the Christian Scriptures—both Old and New Testament—the apocryphal writings, Christian and semi-Christian, the Jewish Church with its insistence on the Old Testament, and the living voice of the Catholic Church which was gradually determining an authoritative Canon of Holy Writ, and had already rejected the apocryphal gospels and ratified the great bulk of what was shortly to be incorporated in the Canon of the New Testament. There was also some form of Orientalism available ; and the Alexandrian teachers were, without any doubt, well acquainted with the Greek philosophy of the age. From this mass of material a system was evolved, of which the main outlines are as follows.

The Supreme Being is ineffable, unknown, and unknowing. From the Supreme are evolved a series of aeons or emanations, which may be thought of either as divine attributes or as real spiritual personalities. In one system the aeons are arranged in pairs, and the whole process of their production is described as sexual ; in another, they are represented as sexless. The last aeon is Jesus ; another, of a slightly higher grade, is Christ. The whole company of aeons, taken together, constitute the pleroma, the fullness of ineffable being. The material world is outside the pleroma, and its Creator is an inferior being, born of an illegitimate Desire, which had been expelled from among the aeons. The Creator is wholly distinct from and infinitely inferior to the Supreme Being, and his created world is a travesty of the pleroma ; but in

his blindness he knows nothing beyond it, and believes himself to be supreme. The God of the Old Testament is identified with this Creator or Demiurge. Men belong to the material sphere; but some men have in them a divine spark which descended from the pleroma, and are therefore capable of redemption. Redemption consists in the deliverance of the divine spark, the spiritual part of man, from its association with matter. The Redeemer is the aeon Jesus, who descended into the material sphere to deliver the spiritual element in man [or in some men]. The man called Jesus was born in a natural way:[1] the aeon descended upon him at his baptism, and left him again before the crucifixion, taking with it the entire spiritual part of the now composite person and leaving only a psychic and material semblance of a man to suffer death. According to another system the entire incarnation was a mere semblance of humanity. Matter is in itself evil, and the material world is incapable of redemption; thus a true union between the divine and human natures is impossible, and the Supreme cannot be incarnate. In what way the pseudo-incarnation of the aeon Jesus promotes the redemption of mankind does not appear to be discussed, unless it be in his revelation of man's double nature; and the doctrine of re-incarnation is [in some Gnostic systems] taken for granted, according to which man's higher nature must by its own effort and through a series of many births gradually dissociate itself from the lower, until

[1] [But see below, p. 23, note 1.—Ed.]

at last the liberated 'divine spark' shall gain admittance into the pleroma. In the meantime, man's physical body is no true part of himself: his association with it is of the nature of an oppressive bondage, and he—that is, his higher self—is in no way responsible for its actions. One of the sects taught a severe asceticism as the result of this theory of matter: its members practised vegetarianism, inculcated celibacy, and held that marriage was the work of Satan. But the deduction made by other sects was that the *gnosis* has no concern with common life, that bodily actions are indifferent; and that since matter is itself evil, and the source of all evil, there is no room for further moral distinctions. The result was, as might perhaps be expected, that the Gnostics quickly acquired a reputation for the grossest immorality. S. Irenaeus, the great Christian writer of the second century, from whom much of our knowledge of them is derived, refuses, with a generous faith in human nature, to believe that their lives were as evil as their teachings permitted them to be; but it would seem that, in general, pure living was not reputed a characteristic of the followers of Gnosticism.

This summary, brief and incomplete though it is, will suffice to show anyone, who is at all acquainted with modern Theosophy, the striking resemblance between this system and second-century Gnosticism. There was a real problem to be faced; and a vigorous attempt was made to provide a solution, and, at the same time, to reckon with Christianity, the cardinal doctrines

of which were emphatically repudiated. The form in which the profound problems of life, as we know it, present themselves to the human mind, vary from age to age, and it is not always the same aspect, even of the same problem, that is most clamant for attention ; but in spite of such variations there are certain fundamental questions that must continually recur from age to age. Such are those which are concerned with the Nature of God, the Nature of Man, and the Nature of Salvation ; or, to put the last at its vaguest, the nature of the essential need of humankind, and the means by which that need can be met. And, further, wherever the Christian revelation has dawned upon the mental horizon, there is the equally insistent question of the Person and the Work of Christ. The Gnostic answer was to push back the Supreme into a dim distance beyond even the reach of speculation. He is spoken of as the Abyss, unknown and unknowable, and we seem almost to hear echoes of the *neti, neti*, of the Upanishads. Then to fill the void between this great Unknown and man is interpolated a hierarchy of ineffable Beings—aeons, we may call them, or principalities and powers, or Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Avatars (the idea behind the variety of names is still the same) ; they are intermediary beings, with the lowest of whom the highest of men may hope to come into contact, since direct approach to the Supreme is a thing impossible for human nature. Further, salvation, the great desideratum of human nature, must begin with release from the bondage of material

conditions : not as in the Christian Faith, with release from sin. Considerations of moral guilt have no place in the system. The ' good news ' is a *gnosis*—that is, an intellectual system : it has no particular bearing on conduct. The Christology also of Theosophy presents striking similarities with that of Gnosticism : indeed, in their broad outlines they are almost identical. The Incarnation of God Almighty—that is, the union in one Person of the divine and human natures—is wholly rejected ; the man Jesus is declared to be a natural man born in a natural way ;[1] his person, or some elements of it, was made use of for a time by a higher being (not, however, the Supreme Being), who descended upon him, and subsequently left him again ; the death upon the Cross was either that of a natural and ordinary man or of a phantom : it had no atoning efficacy. The purpose of the descent of the higher Being—call it the Logos, or the Christ, or the aeon Jesus, which we will—was to teach : it was not to effect any atonement or reconciliation of man to God : the elect among men[2] must work out their own release by their own efforts, and, as some Gnostic teachers held, through a series of incarnations.

The authority on which such doctrines could be maintained in the face of the consistent teaching and the Scriptures of the Catholic Church—and that, too, barely a century after the historic Cruci-

[1] [Or, as other Gnostics taught, constituted by birth from a Virgin a specially pure vessel for the Higher Being.—Ed.]

[2] [For all men are not capable of redemption.—Ed.]

fixion and Resurrection—would need to be considerable. The Gnostics claimed as their authority certain hidden traditions, unknown to the world at large, and differing from the records contained in the canonical Gospels. These traditions were said to embody oral instructions given by Our Lord to certain disciples after the Resurrection, and handed down within a select circle of enlightened believers. From time to time, portions of the tradition were divulged in apocryphal Gospels and other books. One of these Gnostic treatises—though of a later age, probably dating from towards the end of the third century—is still extant under the title of *Pistis Sophia*. The canonical Scriptures. were treated in a high-handed and arbitrary manner. The Old Testament was rejected entirely, and the God of the Old Testament was identified with the Demiurge—the inferior Being who was responsible for the unfortunate genesis of the material world. Of the New Testament some books, or portions of books, were accepted, and others repudiated : not on any scientific system, but according as they could or could not be harmonised with the Gnostic theories.

It was inevitable that as the real nature of Gnosticism became known the impossibility of harmonising it with the Faith of the Catholic Church should become glaringly apparent. It was only as long as Christian terminology was used in public, and a knowledge of what Gnosticism really involved was confined to esoteric circles, that professing Gnostics could continue to be professing Christians. Thus Valentinus, the founder of the

most famous of the Alexandrian schools of Gnosticism, was at last called upon to choose between Gnosticism and Christianity. He had settled in Rome, where he gathered a following, and tried to propagate his opinions and win adherents within the borders of the Christian Church—evidently maintaining that his doctrines were not incompatible with Christianity. But the Catholic Church thought otherwise. Valentinus was excommunicated: at first temporarily as a disciplinary measure, but later, on his refusing to recant his errors, he was finally excluded from the Church, and his company of followers became a separate organisation outside it. A similar fate seems to have overtaken other and less conspicuous associations of Gnostics. But the most determined effort to capture Christianity for Gnosticism, or at least to harmonise the two, was made by Marcion. Marcion was the son of a Bishop, a native of Sinope, on the Black Sea. He came to Rome about A.D. 140, and for four years he endeavoured, while still a member of the Church, to propagate doctrines which were a modification of Gnosticism and were certainly not Christian. He professed himself an ardent disciple of S. Paul, whose attitude towards Judaism he represented as including an entire renunciation of the God of the Old Testament, the Creator, in favour of another God, the Father of all mercies. This was Gnostic dualism, disingenuously ascribed to the authority of S. Paul. Marcion's Christology was pure docetism. It was impossible that Jesus could owe anything, even a body, to the lower God: his humanity,

therefore, was only a semblance, he was no real man at all, nor was he really God, but a manifestation of God in a semblance of humanity. The value of such a life and appearance of death is not explained. Marcion's ethics were an extreme form of asceticism, and he disallowed marriage altogether. His relations with the Catholic Church are illuminating. Within the brief space of four years, and in spite of his profession of devoted discipleship of S. Paul, the entire incompatibility of his teachings with the Catholic Faith was discovered and insisted upon. A large sum of money which he had previously contributed to the common fund was returned to him, and he was dismissed from the Church as a heretic. He then proceeded to set up a Church of his own, and no longer like the Valentinians offered esoteric teaching in select circles only, but organised a great movement, which rapidly spread through Christendom and attracted many adherents. There is an element of tragedy in the fact that while Marcion himself subsequently repented of his errors, and sought readmission into the Church, he died before he had fulfilled the conditions imposed upon him; and the movement which had escaped his control continued to spread and proved for a time a formidable obstacle to the progress of Christianity. But it was only for a time. *Magna est veritas et praevalet.* Marcionites are heard of in the fifth and again in the seventh centuries. Then they vanish finally. But the Catholic Church is now what she was at the beginning: her confines enormously enlarged, her comprehension of many

truths developed and matured; but her Faith, in its essentials, as embodied in her Creeds, unchanged and unchangeable.

While Gnosticism lasted, it produced a voluminous literature; and the polemic literature, produced by the Church to meet it, was also considerable. This latter seems to have consisted largely in an exposure of what Gnosticism really involved; and there can be little doubt that many persons drifted into it, as they drift to-day into various other cults, without at first fully understanding to what they were committing themselves. But when the exposure was made, when men were able fairly to look the two systems in the face and choose between them, then, as we have seen, the victory lay with the Church: not, it is true, without the loss of many individuals, who were carried away by enthusiasm for a new cause, but none the less ultimately and decisively. And if we ask what were the considerations that weighed in bringing about this victory, what were the essential flaws in Gnosticism that caused it to lose its hold upon the minds and souls of men, and discredited it when the novelty had worn off, we shall find them to be mainly three. It is to these three considerations that S. Irenaeus continually returns in his great polemic '*Contra Haereses*.'

1. First, there is the most unfortunate question of Gnostic morals, already referred to. The doctrine that matter is either illusory or essentially evil, with the deduction that the spiritual part of man, his true self, has no real connection with and no

responsibility for the actions of the material part: leads, as we have seen, to the further deduction, or choice of deductions, either that the flesh should be mortified and gradually rendered inoperative by vigorous ascetism, or else that deeds done in the flesh are a matter of indifference—a doctrine which at once gives sanction to the most abandoned libertinism. Some of the Gnostic sects adopted the former alternative; but there is grave doubt as to the extent to which their practice followed their theory, and Marcion's wholesale condemnation of marriage is not a counsel that commends itself to those who have public morality at heart. S. Irenaeus and Hermas, author of 'The Shepherd of Hermas,' writing in the days when Gnosticism was at its zenith, both utter the most solemn warnings of the dangerous moral tendencies of these teachings; and their warnings were not ill-founded. Several of the sects openly condoned profligacy, and their adherents acquired an infamous reputation. This, it should be observed, was not due merely to the degeneracy of individuals, but was recognised as characteristic of Gnostics as such, and was a direct sequence of their religious tenets. If similar results happily do not attend upon similar beliefs at the present day, it is only fair to remember that, in countries that have been saturated for centuries in Christian thought and ideals, public opinion supplies a very powerful corrective of ideals lower than Christian.

2. Without entering into a discussion of separate and particular Gnostic tenets, there was a serious

intellectual fallacy that underlay their whole position. It is to be found in their selection of authorities. As we have seen, they called themselves Christian as long as the name was permitted to them : they professed that they alone understood the real esoteric significance of Christianity, since they were in possession of a secret tradition not known to the responsible heads of the Christian Community ; and in virtue of this peculiar knowledge they assumed the right to correct the accepted doctrines of Christianity, to retain certain passages of Holy Scripture and reject others, and to read strange and elaborate theories into passages whose plain meaning is obviously quite otherwise. As an example of this last process, the raising of Jairus' daughter was interpreted to mean the raising of Achamoth, the mother of the Demiurge—*i.e.* the Creator—into the light of the pleroma. The whole treatment of the Catholic Faith, and of the Scriptures in which it is embodied, is forcibly paralleled in method, though not in detail of expression, in modern Theosophic writings. S. Irenaeus compares the Gnostic process of exposition with that of manipulating the separate bits of a mosaic till the picture of a king becomes the picture of a fox. He is urgent in his denunciation of the disingenuousness displayed. The Catholic Faith must be taken as a whole : it cannot be cut up into bits and rearranged. Either let them accept it, and abandon all doctrines that are inconsistent with it, or else let them honestly confess that, so far from being its real exponents, they are its determined enemies.

3. This introduces the question: On what is Christianity really based, and, when opinions differ, what is the ultimate test of orthodoxy and heresy? On what grounds have Catholics a better right than Gnostics to claim to be the true exponents of Christianity? Now, Christians are not Bibliolaters; and the Catholic Faith is not based upon a book: it is based upon the Person of Christ; and the impress of that Person, left upon those who knew Him in the flesh, is the nucleus of the Christian tradition. It was not long after the Ascension before records began to be written of such narratives and instructions as one and another could remember. But, naturally, the value of such records would vary very considerably. It was the function of the Catholic Church, of the body of men—that is, among whom the impress of His Person was vividly retained—to discriminate among these records, to retain such as were faithful to the impress, and to reject the rest. The first leaders of the Church were the very men who, by close association and special training, had received most vividly and indelibly the impress of His Person; and they were succeeded by others who 'continued steadfastly in the Apostles' teaching and fellowship.' If, in a subsequent century, men, who had failed to catch this impress, denounce the Faith thus handed on in Apostolic Succession as a tissue of errors, and introduce new doctrines about a quite different Saviour, their rival creed must in common honesty be recognised as a rival; and it must be admitted that, whatever else it is, at least it is not

Christianity. The test of Christian orthodoxy was the same in the second century as in the first, and it is the same now: it is faith in 'the man Christ Jesus,' Who is also Son of God, one with the Father. 'Beloved, believe not every spirit,' says S. John, 'but prove the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the spirit of God: every spirit which confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.' 'Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abideth in him, and he in God.' 'Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is begotten of God.' 'Every spirit which confesseth not Jesus, is not of God.' This, repeated no less vigorously by S. Irenaeus and others, was the answer of the Catholic Church to Gnosticism.

But though Gnosticism missed the Light of the World, and guided men instead to so deplorably faint and flickering a glimmer, yet it undoubtedly represents much honest search after Truth. Rays from the great glory, too, were dimly perceived and confused with lesser lights; and, among other things, the doctrine of the pleroma and of the aeons is not without indebtedness to the true Catholic doctrine of the pleroma, and the fact of the existence of angels. These subjects will be discussed in the chapter on the Logos.

CHAPTER III

THEOSOPHIC EVIDENCES

THE term ' Christian Evidences ' is a technical term in theology, and covers, generally speaking, all that range of inquiry which is indicated in plain words by such questions as : ' Why should I be a Christian ? What is the nature of the appeal of Christianity, and what reasons are there for believing that the Christian position is the true one ? ' The Christian Church welcomes such inquiry, and endeavours to formulate a satisfactory answer. It is not, therefore, unfair to approach Theosophy with similar questions : Why should one be a Theosophist ? What is the nature of the appeal of Theosophy, and what reasons are there for believing that the Theosophic position is the true one ?

The inquiry is complicated at the outset by the fact that, while it is comparatively easy to state what Christianity is, and what constitutes a Christian, it is peculiarly difficult to define Theosophy or a Theosophist. Is Theosophy primarily, or only secondarily, a religious system ? For there is no doubt that, in any case, it is also a system of various

sciences. Christianity is essentially a religion: its central fact is the Person of Christ, and it is committed to certain doctrines about Him; but it is not committed to any particular views on the natural sciences, nor is it even committed to scientific research. Such subjects are outside its sphere, or are only indirectly connected with it. But what is the central fact of Theosophy? From the enumeration of comparative religion, philosophy, science, and occultism in the three main objects of the Society, and from the large amount of dogmatic teaching on these subjects contained in its authoritative literature, it is clear that it is very much concerned with scientific research. It is not, therefore, out of place to inquire what has been its contribution to the scientific knowledge of mankind.

Let us begin with Comparative Religion. At the time, when the three objects of the Theosophical Society were drawn up, there was, undoubtedly, much need for inculcating a more sympathetic attitude towards the religious thought of the East: more especially towards that of India, with which the Theosophical Society has always been closely identified. At that time, the work of the great Orientalists was not yet popularised; and there was an unfortunate tendency, prevalent among many Christians, towards a wholesale and uncritical condemnation of all non-Christian religions and everything contained in them. Christian missionaries were the people most directly in touch with non-Christian thought; and the missionaries of the day were by no means free from this tendency.

There was great need for a change of attitude and for a serious and sympathetic study of Eastern literature; and credit is due to the Theosophic Society for a good lead in this direction. Now everything is different. An immense amount of work has been done by accredited scholars in the field of Comparative Religion: many of the Sacred Books of the East have been translated into English, the principles of literary criticism have been applied to questions of date and authorship, and the work is still going on. We naturally ask what part has been taken in it by members of a Society pledged to this very study, and the answer is a most disappointing one. The names of Theosophists are conspicuous by their absence from the ranks of accredited students of Comparative Religion. 'Theosophy has made no contribution whatever to our knowledge of Oriental religions. It has not discovered a single fresh fact, nor brought a fresh text to the notice of scholars, nor produced a notable translation or commentary,' says Dr. Farquhar.[1] And, again: 'The bulk of the work they [Theosophists] have done in the exposition of religions is unscientific and seriously misleading' (p. 286). The reason is not far to seek. Theosophists have not adopted modern methods of literary criticism. They have, instead, thrown all the weight of their influence into the support of the ancient traditional position as to dates, authorship, and composition; and the methods employed have been those of dogmatic statement

[1] *Modern Religious Movements in India*, p. 288.

rather than of scientific research. It is easy for the student to verify this statement by looking up references to ancient Indian books and authors in the writings of prominent Theosophists, and comparing what is there said about them with the conclusions of literary research as given, for instance, in Macdonell's 'Sanskrit Literature,' or in the 'Imperial Gazeteer.' One cannot but feel that a great opportunity has been missed, and Theosophists have allowed themselves to be passed by in one of their specially chosen fields of study.

And what has been their contribution in the sphere of the natural sciences? The claim is made that experts, who have developed the power of psychic vision, are able to see much that is hidden from the eyes of the ordinary observer. For example, while chemists are laboriously pursuing, by careful experiment and deduction, their investigations into the nature of the molecule and the atom, the psychic expert (represented by a few leading Theosophists) sees at a glance not only the division of the physical atom, but also plane after plane of etheric, and other states of matter, more subtle than the physical.[1] Now, when a man of science makes a new discovery, his first care is to lay it before his brother scientists, that all may judge together of its value, and that it may be added to the sum total of human knowledge. If Theosophists have so much to contribute, we should naturally expect them to do the same thing. We should suppose that they would be eager to lay

[1] Mrs. Besant, *Occult Chemistry*.

before the scientific world both the results of their researches and the methods employed ; and if the methods should be found to demand special gifts with which few are endowed, at least the results could be offered as hypotheses to be worked over by more usual methods. But no sort of co-operation of this kind has taken place. On the contrary, the attitude of Theosophists towards physical science is commonly one of indifference and contempt. People in general are expected to accept the *ipse dixit* of two or three psychic observers : they are not expected to verify it. And if any one should wish to verify the result, and for this purpose to be instructed in the methods, he will only be received as a disciple on pledging himself to uttermost loyalty to the Theosophic position in general and to the Head of the inner school in particular—a provision which rules out all independent and unbiassed testing. We shall have to return to this in a different connection.

It is an unfortunate method, and becomes still more so with regard to the third Object of the Society—which is ' to investigate the unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in man.' In the early days, this meant occultism ; and ' phenomena ' were a very prominent feature of the propaganda, and were largely relied on by Mme Blavatsky as credentials. Nowadays, the old boundary-line between science and occultism is rapidly fading away, as phenomena, hitherto unexplained, are subjected to rigorous scientific inquiry ; and it would have been much to the credit of

Theosophists had they been pioneers in conducting such inquiry. Unfortunately, Mme Blavatsky took a very different course. Her phenomena involved the claim to very advanced powers of telepathy and clairvoyance : as in the finding of lost objects at Simla ; of clairaudience, as in the hearing of immaterial bells and the like ; and, perhaps, chiefly the claim to have discovered how to perform the transference of matter through matter—' precipitation,' as it was called—as in the case of letters received from the Masters, and other objects. There is, of course, nothing extravagant in hoping that science may advance still farther in the direction of the transference of matter through matter ; but real advance can only be made by open inquiry and genuine scientific testing step by step. The Society for Psychical Research already existed for the investigation of phenomena which have the appearance of being beyond the known laws of cause and effect ; and it is well known that its methods are strictly scientific ; and its membership includes men of distinction, whose integrity is above suspicion. Mme Blavatsky's relations with this Society were peculiarly unfortunate and peculiarly damaging to her cause. The story of the investigation by the S.P.R. of the phenomena connected with the famous ' shrine ' at Madras in 1884 is now an old one ; but, unfortunately, it is still significant. It may be read in full in Dr. Farquhar's ' Modern Religious Movements in India.' This shrine was a case built into the wall between two rooms in the house inhabited by Mme Blavatsky.

Letters were placed in it addressed to the Masters ; it was then kept locked, and answers from the Masters were in due course found in it, ' precipitated,' it was said, from their distant abode in Thibet. During the absence of Mme Blavatsky in England, certain employees of the Society brought various allegations of bad faith against her, including charges of tampering with the shrine. It was then discovered that there was a false back to the shrine and a secret way of access to it from the room behind, which was Mme Blavatsky's bedroom. Her defence was that the alterations in the wall were made by her enemies after her departure from India. The S.P.R. was already inquiring into Theosophic phenomena in England, and sent a representative to investigate the Madras matters on the spot. Not only did Mme Blavatsky refuse to co-operate with this representative, but she took up a definitely hostile attitude towards him : destroyed evidence, made deplorably false statements, and was ultimately convicted of deliberate and consistent fraud. Even her best friends can hardly claim that her phenomena have contributed anything to the sum total of human knowledge. Theosophists have avoided phenomena since those days, and occultism takes other forms ; but the unfortunate attitude of refusal to co-operate with recognised science is unchanged, and this goes very far to invalidate all results.

This attitude is constant in every department of knowledge. There is no doubt that Theosophists were first in the field by many years in securing

and recording those psychic impressions which they themselves describe as the results of psychometry, or the reading of the etheric records, and which later investigators have attributed to flashes of 'the universal memory,' or to communications from the departed. But while the scientific investigator accumulates and compares data, applies careful tests, makes his methods and results public—as far as they go—and then seeks to find a general law which shall cover all the facts, the Theosophic 'expert' has his law ready made, offers it for acceptance not for investigation, and takes the attitude of a teacher absolutely sure of his facts, who is imparting them to the uninstructed learner. It is much to be regretted that, through this unfortunate attitude, so much devoted research and what might be valuable data for the discovery of new laws are being to a large extent kept back from enriching the world.

We must now consider the contribution of Theosophy under its religious and social aspect. Something will be said again in another chapter of its claim to promote universal brotherhood. What, apart from this, has been in the sphere of practical religion and social ethics its contribution to the well-being of mankind?

For this purpose it is not enough to see it as it appears in Europe or America, involuntarily protected and restrained by that public opinion which is itself the outcome of Christianity. We must see it as it is in India, apart from such protection and restraint. This is a point of much importance,

and one that is too commonly overlooked by English Theosophists. It is impossible adequately to estimate the true significance of Theosophy without considering its position and significance in India. It has until lately been very difficult in a so-called Christian country to realise at all adequately our great social indebtedness to Christianity. We may neglect the Faith, disobey it, or deny it piecemeal, but we British are still so saturated with the atmosphere it has created that few wholly renounce it and none escape its influence. Germany has of late done much to open our eyes to what human nature is still capable of when the ethical standards of Christianity are deliberately abandoned. In India, at least, as regards the bulk of the vast non-Christian population, these standards have never been adopted. There is much that is very beautiful and worthy of high regard in the lives and ideals of many Hindus, and there are beautiful passages in the sacred Books; but, at the same time, Hinduism, as a religious system, quite definitely gives its sanction to gross social evils which are abhorred by Christians.

The chief of these evils may be grouped under three heads: those relating to caste, idolatry, and the degradation of women. It is not merely that these social evils are practised by Hindus as other social evils are practised by professing Christians; for a Christian, when he takes part in evil, does so in defiance of his religion. And the things that we are learning to deplore in the social condition of England to-day are things that are not Christian; while for a Hindu many social wrongs are matters of religious

obligation, and a man is often compelled in the name of religion to acts of inhumanity against which his better nature instinctively revolts. It follows, then, that all movements for social reform in India are at the same time movements for religious reform : the two terms are, to a large extent, interchangeable. The past century has seen the rise of many such movements, which have become distinct religious sects. The great upheaval, of which they are parts, has been mainly brought about by the stimulus afforded by the presence of the British Government and of Christian Missions respectively. The presence of the former has involuntarily forced readjustment on the material side, and the religious sanctions behind the old-time customs have suffered severe strain : the challenge of the latter has compelled investigation into the nature and value of those religious sanctions. Accordingly, the modern movements in India may be classified and grouped according to their attitude toward social—which is at the same time religious—reform. Dr. Farquhar arranges them in three groups : (1) those favouring vigorous reform ; (2) those in which reform is checked by defence of the old faiths ; (3) those which undertake full defence of the old religions. The religion with which we are here concerned is Hinduism ; for it is with this that Theosophy is most intimately associated. In spite of its foreign origin, Theosophy has indisputably won for itself a place among modern religious movements in India, and may almost be regarded as a sect of Hinduism. It is, therefore, of grave importance that we should

inform ourselves of its position and significance in that country, and discover in which of the three groups mentioned above it must be placed. For fuller information on this subject the reader is referred to 'Modern Religious Movements in India,' by Dr. J. N. Farquhar, from which part of the matter of this chapter is derived.

To return to the three groups of sects. The first group is the oldest. It includes, as the most prominent movement, the Brahmo Samaj. This Society, founded in 1829, has made a vigorous attack on all the three abuses. It has abolished idolatry and caste within its membership, its women are educated and comparatively free, and child marriage is strongly discouraged. But such drastic reforms proved too much for orthodox Hinduism: a breach followed, and the Brahmo Samaj is now a separate organisation outside Hinduism; its religious position is practically that of Unitarianism. Being thoroughly Indian and indigenous, its example is doing a great deal in Bengal to encourage reform among the orthodox.

After the rise of the Brahmo Samaj, a reaction set in; and the next group of sects are attempting the difficult task of social reform combined with religious conservatism. The most prominent in this group is the Arya Samaj, founded in 1875. This Society has succeeded in abolishing idolatry, modifying caste, and greatly promoting the education of women. It also admits to membership those who are not born Hindus. But these reforms could not be carried through without the sacrifice of very

much that is commonly included in orthodox Hinduism, and the Arya Samaj is by no means willing to abandon Hinduism. The position taken is an ingenious one, and is indicated by the motto 'Back to the Veds.' The Veds are the most ancient of all the Indian sacred writings; they largely consist of songs of Nature worship, and form a very slender basis on which to build up a religion. But the Arya Samajists profess a passionate devotion to them: they believe in their verbal inspiration, and they sweep away anything objectionable in later Hinduism as a mere medieval accretion. For the rest, the manual on theology, written by their founder, is their Bible. It is a curious position, and one does not see how it can be a stable one. Anything disapproved of is not considered integral to Hinduism; and it would seem that the growing influence of Christian ethical standards has a good deal to say in determining what can and what can not be approved of; though Arya Samajists are bitterly hostile to Christianity, and would be the last to admit any such debt.

In the third group of sects the reaction is still more complete. We can summarise the three positions somewhat as follows: The first—abuses are part of orthodox Hinduism; we will break away and become unorthodox. The second—abuses are not part of orthodox Hinduism; we are at liberty to purge away anything we consider as abuse. The third position now remains—Hinduism cannot be an abuse; anything really inherent in it we will defend to the utmost. This is the position taken

up among others by the sect to which belonged Svami Vivekananda, who at one time acquired a certain popularity in England and America. It is not too much to say that it is not only a conservative, but a retrograde position. Many Western-educated men, who in consequence of their education were becoming dislodged from the old orthodox position and ready for advance, have been drawn back to give the full weight of their influence to maintaining the old abuses, as they have come under the influence of religious leaders of this school. Such leaders deliberately shut their eyes to the evils in Hinduism : immoral teaching and legends of the gods they gloss over with allegorical interpretations, and the actual evils that are practised all around them they either consider harmless or treat as non-existent with that consummate power of deliberately inducing hallucinations in themselves and others, of which Orientals are peculiarly capable. A glamour is cast over everything Indian —and especially over everything Hindu—which effectively inhibits reform.

We have now to consider to which group the Theosophical Society belongs. We have seen that, for this purpose, we must consider its attitude towards the three central abuses of Hinduism : caste, idolatry, and the degradation of women. We will take the last first. In this connection, high praise is due to Theosophists. They have established a number of schools for girls, and have succeeded in winning the confidence of the community to an extent rare among foreigners ; child marriage is

strongly discountenanced, and Indian Theosophists are encouraged to free their wives from *parda* restrictions and accord them more generous and honourable treatment. The devoted lives of those English women Theosophists who are giving themselves, like Christian missionaries, to the service of Indian women, are, like theirs, gaining their reward. But movements in all the three groups are doing something in their degree for the improvement of the position of women ; and, moreover, some of the worst cruelties are inflicted upon women in connection with caste obligations, so that it is ultimately not so much by its attitude towards women alone as by its attitude towards the other two abuses that the tendency of any given movement is indicated. The great stronghold of modern Hinduism is caste. A Hindu may hold any views he likes, and worship any god he likes, and no authority will interfere with him ; but the moment he begins to break caste rules, in however trifling a particular, an unfailing Nemesis descends upon him : penalties are inflicted, varying with the degree of the offence ; and if he prove obdurate, or if the offence be a grave one, he is put out of caste—a horrible calamity which no one can contemplate with equanimity. When a man is out of caste no one may marry into his family ; he is thrust out of society as one defiled, and the horror of the situation often involves his relations to several degrees, and these to a greater or less extent have to share his punishment. The chief caste prohibitions relate to interdining and intermarriage ; but there are

innumerable lesser ones, and the whole system is based on the theory that the contact of one human being is utterly contaminating to another, and that wholly apart from any question of personal cleanliness or moral purity. It is solely a question of descent. The whole caste system is the very antithesis of brotherhood ; and it is a very deplorable fact that Theosophy has given its unqualified approval to the principle of caste—not, of course, to all the rules enforced under the caste system, but to the general underlying principle. This approval is expressly stated in authoritative Theosophical works, and it is a commonplace among Theosophists in India. It is true that in England the question of caste may have little more than academic interest : in India it is intensely practical and affects a man's actions at every turn. The attitude, therefore, of any religious movement towards caste cannot remain indeterminate : it must be precise and final. Either it sanctions caste or it does not. Christianity, of course, does not. There is no caste among Christians : there is brotherhood. Theosophy, unfortunately, does. Indian Theosophists, as a body, do not break caste : they remain subject to its rules and liable to contamination from each other. Theosophy is doing nothing, as a movement, to break this iron fetter which is cramping and crushing the Hindu peoples, and which their own reformers recognise as the greatest obstacle in the way of their natural progress.

The position is the same with regard to idolatry. For those who have not lived in a country where

idolatry is practised, it needs a good deal of reading and a good deal of imagination to comprehend the nature of the downward moral pull of idolatrous worship. Tourists often shrink in horror from the sight of devout women prostrating themselves before some grotesque vermilion-bedaubed image of a creature, half-human half-animal, or educated men kissing the tail of a cow in the temple of the goddess of Plenty—which things are of daily occurrence in the sacred city of Benares. But what must be the effect upon the mind of those who are brought up from childhood to believe that high deities are really and indeed brought near to men by such media, and that by meditating on a hideous six-armed monstrosity—such as Kali, or a phallic symbol, such as that of Shiu—one may best draw near to the great God and Father of all, for whom all hearts are seeking. Yet the Theosophical Society deliberately adopts and encourages idolatry, and with it, perforce, gives its sanction to the utterly false ideas of the nature of God which idol-worship imparts. Up to a few years ago, images were to be seen in prominent places in the Central Hindu College, and over the door of the private house occupied by the President of the Theosophical Society in Benares. There is no reason to suppose they are not there still. These things have a very melancholy significance in India.

It is only too possible to follow Dr. Farquhar to the conclusion that Theosophy must be placed in the third group of sects—those which undertake full defence of Hinduism, including the abuses,

The attitude of Theosophy towards caste and idolatry is indicative of its attitude towards Hinduism as a whole. Theosophy in India has frankly adopted the position that everything in Hinduism is to be defended to the utmost : that, taken as an exoteric system, it is superior to Christianity as a vehicle for the transmission of esoteric truths, and that anything current in Hinduism must, somehow or other, be provided with an explanation in modern terms, and buttressed up against decay. There is an increasing number of educated men who are finding the old orthodox position untenable ; and there are a few earnest reformers, still Hindu, who are denouncing in the strongest terms the evils of caste and idolatry, and the innumerable superstitious customs connected with them. A great conflict of ideals is going on ; and here, as elsewhere, change is in the air. The effect upon the situation can, perhaps, be a little imagined when a Society, founded by Westerners, flings the whole weight of its influence on to the side of reaction and the arrest of progress. The belief is powerfully encouraged that, after all, the superstitions can be justified on a scientific basis ; the grosser and more immoral cults can be explained away by allegorical interpretations ; and Hinduism, if only it be properly understood, must, by its superior merits, attract cultured English people away from Christianity. The whole tendency is to hinder progress by denying the need of reform. This, generally speaking, is the significance of Theosophy in India ; and it is no use to shut our eyes to the

facts, much as we may deplore them. The political propaganda recently carried on by leaders of the Theosophical Society, it would probably be unfair to look upon as directly connected with Theosophy.

We must now pass on from considering the contribution of Theosophy to human knowledge and human well-being, respectively, to consider what is its ultimate ground of belief. A considerable body of highly dogmatic teaching on many subjects is put forth for the acceptance of the world with an assurance that, in itself, goes far to impress the non-critical. But the thinking man naturally asks: What is the authority behind it all? How can one know it to be true, especially when the teaching is opposed to the general opinion of recognised experts in the various subjects? Mr. Leadbeater puts the answer briefly and concisely: 'It is all a question of vibration.' The theory of the akashic records, to which this answer ultimately refers, is familiar to Theosophists. All that has ever been done or said upon this planet has left an indelible impression upon a certain highly rarified and subtle plane of matter, known as the akashic. Adepts, who have trained themselves to respond to vibrations upon the various supra-physical planes of matter up to the akashic, are able to read off the records at will, and thus to become possessed of infallible information upon any subject. They are able to dispense with ordinary means of acquiring information, and to sweep aside the results of the laborious research

of scholars. Theoretically, anyone may train himself to respond to the vibrations, and thus become able to verify the results: just as anyone may give himself to the study of mathematics, and so verify the results of the great mathematicians. If the average man prefers to accept a good deal on the authority of experts in occultism, he accepts no less on the authority of experts in mathematics. Such are, generally speaking, the grounds on which Theosophists claim our acceptance of their teaching.

But there is a very marked difference between the authority of the expert in mathematics, or any other science, and the authority of the Theosophic expert. We have already emphasised the fact that when any new discovery is made in science each step in the train of reasoning is made public, and facts are offered for challenge and testing. There are, moreover, multitudes of people who are able to follow the work of the great discoverers and, to a certain extent, judge of their results; and —at least in the initial stages—any educated person can, if he will, enter upon the study of the particular subject: it needs no special gifts to acquire the rudiments. In the case of occultism, on the other hand, it needs a special natural qualification to be able to become sensitive at all on any of the aetheric or psychic planes. Very few have this natural qualification, and fewer still proceed far enough to obtain any definite results. As a matter of fact, therefore, the invitation to train ourselves to respond to the required vibrations, and so test it

all for ourselves, is a meaningless one: the thing is impracticable, and the matter resolves itself into accepting the *ipse dixit* of those who can [or say they can]. For all practical purposes this reduces itself in the Theosophical Society to the *ipse dixit* of a very few persons—Mme Blavatsky and two or three others now living. The great bulk of the teaching, specifically known as Theosophy, is based upon the untested and untestable statements of these authorities. Moreover, if a student wishes to make a serious study of the subject, and to be trained to respond to vibrations, he must, as we have seen before, place himself under discipleship in the inner school. This involves a position of absolute loyalty to the Head of the school, and a recognition of the unimpeachable nature of the knowledge dispensed in the school. A serious student of Theosophy will also very quickly find himself confronted with another claim, which is not much pressed before the general public—the claim of the Society as a whole, and of the President of the Society in particular, to be the medium of the Masters, the Adepts of the Great White Lodge, for imparting long-hidden knowledge to those who can receive it. Much of the teaching given forth, and some of the directions for the government of the Society, are given directly on their authority, and are thus to be received with unquestioning submission by the faithful. It is a matter of history that those who have from time to time defied the authority of the nominee of the Masters to the Presidentship have not remained, even

outwardly, members of the Society.[1] The effect upon the mind of those who place themselves under training in such a system can perhaps be a little imagined. The disciple makes an absolute surrender of his reasoning faculties; he accepts all he is taught without question—even when what have hitherto seemed to him matters of common knowledge are discarded as matters of common ignorance. As he advances, this surrender of the intellect increases, and the inhibition of the reasoning faculty becomes more and more complete. He learns to look to his teachers to direct his attitude towards every department of knowledge; he desires to see everything from the Theosophic standpoint only, and will shrink from forming an opinion for himself, or even from accepting the statements of recognised scholars who are not Theosophists. For example, scholars are agreed that few facts in history are better authenticated than the birth of Jesus Christ, a few years before the beginning of the present Christian era, and His suffering under Pontius Pilate. But since Theosophists have read in the akashic records that He was born 105 B.C.,

[1] 1. Those who refused to accept the ruling of Mrs. Besant, in the matter of Mr. Leadbeater, seceded and formed a separate society, called 'The Quest,' under the leadership of Mr. G. R. S. Mead. Grave charges of teaching, and practices opposed to morality, had been brought against Mr. Leadbeater, who was a prominent official of the Society; he acknowledged the truth of some of the charges and resigned his membership. A few years later, Mrs. Besant reinstated him as both a member and an official of the Society, without any withdrawal of his views. (2) The majority of the German Lodges, under the leadership of Dr. Steiner, revolted against the authority of Mrs. Besant, chiefly in the matter of the cult of Alcyone (*vide* Chap. I, p. 14), and seceded and formed a separate society shortly before the War.

and the mention of Pontius Pilate in the Creed and the Gospels is a crude blunder of ignorant transcribers—the original being something quite different—the disciple of Theosophy will unhesitatingly and uncompromisingly adopt the latter view. The surrender of the mind to Theosophic influences is usually so gradual a process that the subject is quite unaware of what is happening until it is too late. Warnings are only too often rejected with scorn, and the mind succumbs to the potent soporific without a struggle. It is this condition of utter submission of the intellect that is the real cause of the hold that certain doctrines —such, for instance, as those of re-incarnation and *karma*—have upon the individual Theosophist. Could the mind once shake itself free, the doctrines would cease to attract; but the freedom once lost is terribly hard to regain.

It has been said that a certain amount of mental bias is a necessity for disposing the mind to accept any truth—and this is true in a certain sense. But mental bias, if it is to be a help and not a fatal hindrance, should have its negative side in freedom from any prejudice which may hinder the mind from accepting the truth; and its positive side should consist in an instinctive turning towards what is true wherever found—not in bondage to any particular and exclusive source of information. Yet people deliberately decide, for personal reasons, to believe all that Mrs. Besant or Mr. Leadbeater say on any subject, whether supported or unsupported by experts in those subjects. The

ordinary man is justified in believing that aeroplanes can fly, because they are seen to do so; and he is justified in believing that various diseases can be mitigated by inoculation, because the medical profession is agreed about it;—these things have nothing to do with his personal feelings towards any individual engineer or doctor. Belief in the findings of Theosophy, on the contrary, is entirely bound up with one's private attitude towards a few individuals, and a disposal to accept their statements against those of the world. This denotes a wholly unscientific temper of mind. There is, of course, also a general disposition to approve of the bulk of the teaching, and a feeling that it appeals to one as attractive and likely to satisfy; but such a feeling cannot constitute a ground of belief. The personal authority of those who are responsible for the teaching is for the individual Theosophist the real ground of belief.

And the authoritative teachers refer, as we have seen, the bulk of the information they offer to their power to read the akashic records—that is to say, the ultimate source of knowledge is occult research, pursued by means of the psychic faculties. Occultists can see, for example, beyond the violet ray of the spectrum, where vibrations are too subtle for the ordinary eye to follow; and beyond again to vibrations of a still subtler order. Such investigations, together with communications from the Masters, constitute the real source behind it all. 'It is all a question of vibration.' There is no moral appeal whatever. In fact, when the unfortu-

nate case of Mr. Leadbeater came up, some years ago, it was definitely stated by the highest authority in the Society that morals had nothing to do with Theosophy.[1] Can one imagine a Christian Bishop, accused of complicity in grossly immoral proceedings, being reinstated by the highest Church authority on the grounds not that he was wrongly accused, but that morals had nothing to do with Christianity? The low standard of veracity, too, that has from time to time characterised the proceedings of eminent Theosophists is another illustration of the absence of a moral standard in Theosophy.[2] These things should be a danger-signal to those whose moral judgment is still undamaged.

The case is very different with Christianity. It is well known that research of all kinds—historical, literary, scientific—has been brought to bear upon the various tenets of the Faith: Christian scholars have given their lives to such research; great stores of learning have been expended in both attack and defence, and a branch of theology, technically known as Christian Evidences, has been built up. Christianity has nothing to fear from the most searching inquiry. This, in itself, is a great advance upon the Theosophic position. But it is not in the sphere of the intellect that the ultimate ground of belief in Christianity is to be found. What has drawn and held men and women through the ages

[1] *Vide* footnote, Chap. III, p. 18.

[2] *Vide* Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India*, section on 'Theosophy'; and Eugene Lévy, *Mme Annie Besant et la Crise de la Société Théosophique*.

has been the compelling attraction of the Divine Personality of Jesus Christ. Scholars may have vindicated the faith that was in them, on intellectual lines, but the faith is equally sure in the simple and unlearned, who cannot vindicate it. Nor is it a question of dependence on the word of a human teacher, but of faith in the Son of God. The human manifestation of the Love of God, to which the whole moral nature responds, and which draws the soul into a vital and indissoluble union with Himself, is for the individual, and for the world, the ultimate ground of belief in Christianity. For it is not a training to respond to material vibrations, or the acquiring of a compendium of information on various subjects, or even a certain attitude of mind, upon which the Christian neophyte enters when he is baptised into Christ, but a life of union with Christ, which is manifested in holiness and love; and Christ, who offers this life to men, and who, being lifted up, draws all men to Him, is Himself 'the faithful and true witness.' Thus anyone who desires such a life, if he will make Christ his friend through prayer, and receive the grace He offers through the sacraments of His Church, can prove for himself that Christ is able to draw him, step by step, out of all sin and selfishness, into His own life of holiness and love.

CHAPTER IV

ONE GOD THE FATHER

Our conception of God lies at the very base of all our religious thinking. Whatever precise definition of the term religion we may adopt, it must in any case include some idea of God and of our relations with Him—actual or potential. This is fundamental; and if we permit for ourselves loose thinking on this subject, any discussion or comparison of the superstructure of different religious systems must be valueless. Now it is on this very fundamental question of our conception of the nature of God that Christians and Theosophists are divided; and the fact that this fundamental difference is commonly overlooked is productive of much confusion and misunderstanding. It will be well to clear up our thinking on the subject before going further.

Two great questions have engaged the attention of mankind in his more or less conscious search after God, throughout the ages: (1) Is the Supreme One, or more than One? (2) Is He knowable? The first question we may consider as now practically settled, and no longer a problem for thinking men.

Primitive forms of natural religion no doubt involved a real belief in many independent deities or personified forces of nature ; but it would seem that as soon as man passed beyond the stage of mere religious instinct, and began to formulate his thoughts about the objects of his worship, tendencies towards a belief in One Supreme Being began to manifest themselves. In India, there was in Vedic times an intermediate stage—now known as Henotheism—in which one god, selected by the worshipper, became *for him*, for practical purposes, alone and supreme. Later, came the dawn of philosophy in the age of the Upanishads, when Brahman, the great Unknowable, receded ever farther and farther from human comprehension the more men searched after It ; and yet the very process of persistent negations left unassailable the single ultimate quality of Oneness. In ancient Greece the earliest philosophers were concerned with the relations between the One and the Many ; but the later great Masters—Plato and Aristotle—both arrived, though somewhat vaguely, at the conception of a single Supreme Being. The Jews, by the vivid and direct process which on the Godward side we call revelation and on the manward side religious intuition, ignored the slow stages of philosophical research, and arrived at an immediate, direct, and incontrovertible knowledge of one God, Holy and Almighty, and thus made a pre-eminent contribution to the religious experience of the race. Popular worship naturally clings long to its old associations ; but even Greek polytheism, in the

days before it began to be outgrown and discarded, was feeling after something beyond itself in its Zeus, the father of gods and men; and in India to-day, where there still linger abundant survivals of a primitive polytheism, genuine belief in a multiplicity of gods—if really held at all—is held only by those whose mental condition is itself a survival of a cruder age; and it would be hard to find an educated man—or a thinking man, even, if uneducated—who would not unhesitatingly profess his belief in a single Supreme God, and adopt some contrivance for reconciling or explaining away the customary obligations of polytheistic worship. It is not too much to say that thinking mankind is agreed that the Supreme is One.

Unfortunately, this is more than can be said on the second point. The writers of the Upanishads, while unable—as we have seen—to negate His, or Its, Oneness, yet so far negated all other attributes as to push the Supreme back into dim darkness beyond the reach of human aspirations. The Gnostics and others did the same on other lines. But the race of men has not yet been discovered that is content with a remote abstraction in place of a God to be approached and worshipped; and, therefore, the necessary result of postulating an unknowable Supreme is to postulate also a series of lesser beings, still worshipful, though not supreme. This has taken place in two ways. Associated with the unknowable Brahman of the Upanishads is the almost unlimited pantheon of Hindu gods and goddesses; and associated with the Abyss of

Gnosticism is the hierarchy of intermediary beings, known as aeons. Theosophy, as has been seen, follows the way of Gnosticism. Man, being what he is, must worship. If his creed forbids him to worship the highest, he will worship something lower. It is, of course, truth of which we are in search ; and if it be true that the highest is beyond our reach, we must, perforce, content ourselves with the lower. But this would at best be a very evil necessity ; and if a way can be found to immediate approach to the Supreme Himself, all lovers of the highest will be eager to examine and to test it. The very fact that man has such aspirations suggests on *a priori* grounds that the search is not a vain one.

But if God is knowable, then the inevitable conclusion is that He is also Personal. Everything that is, exists for us only as it is viewed in the light of our personality. Things have more or less reality for us according as they are more or less related to us as persons ; and that which has most reality is that with which we can enter into most intimate relations—namely, another person. All material processes—even to the most complicated inventions of modern science—are ultimately directed towards getting into some further relations with other personalities. Even in abstract science—such as astronomy—man is perpetually seeking after the plan behind the phenomena, the evidence—that is, of a personal mind that is at work unseen. This search after union with personalities beyond, but akin to our own, is alone (says Dr. Illingworth) an

end in itself; to this all activities are ultimately subordinated. We shall, therefore, naturally expect, quite apart from direct evidence, that the Supreme Being will be found to be a higher kind of Person, and not a something inferior to us in being devoid of personality.

But it is just here that Theosophists are most strenuously at issue not only with Christians as such, but with a large company of philosophers in all languages that have adopted any form of the Latin word *persona*. It is a very curious phenomenon. Some person in authority in the Theosophical Society has decided that the word personality shall include the idea of limitation: that it is therefore not applicable to the Supreme Being, who must be regarded as an Impersonal It. Further, that the Supreme, not being personal, must be denied all attributes of personality, and must be regarded as unknowable and inactive; and that the existence of intermediary beings becomes a necessity; and it only remains to make further authoritative statements as to their nature and functions. It is far from clear what part of this system is premiss and what part is deduction, and at which end we should begin. But the whole sequence hangs together; and whether it starts from a false premiss or ends in a false conclusion, there is clearly a serious flaw somewhere. Now, words are tokens: like coins, they have a recognised and accepted value among all educated people who use the language in which they are current; they may gradually acquire a fresh significance, but this must be by the common

practice of the whole community. If an individual chooses to assert that the King's shilling is worth thirteen pence, and attempts to do business accordingly, he will not be considered an honest person. If he, further, trains pupils in his peculiar form of arithmetic, and launches them into the business world, their personal good faith may be unimpeachable; but they will not easily find people who will take them seriously. It is not otherwise with language. The term personality is the common property of psychology, philosophy, and religion. It is freely used by writers on all these subjects; and, while the precise nature of personality is still a matter for discussion, the word has, generally speaking, a sufficiently recognised significance to be current coin among those who use it. Theosophists alone arbitrarily insist that it shall of necessity connote the idea of limitation; and they thus rule themselves out of all further discussion, and make anything they have to say on the subject practically meaningless. Anyone, who is at all conversant with Theosophic literature, is aware that a distinction is made between the terms individuality and personality somewhat to this effect: Personality is that which drops off at the end of each incarnation; it is transient and unstable; that which pertains to a man, but is not his true self. Individuality is the self that abides: that which alone gives unity to successive personalities: the string on which the pearls are hung. It will be seen that this distinction tacitly implies the doctrine of re-incarnation—a rather large assump-

tion, if one wishes to be taken seriously by twentieth-century philosophers. And apart from this assumption, the use of the two words is almost an inversion of the current and accepted use. All this is most unfortunate. If people begin by assuming certain special tenets, which are not commonly accepted; then base upon these tenets, or at least associate with them, a revised use of words; and then from this revised use of words deduce certain other tenets in close harmony with the first—; the process is not far removed from a vicious circle. If Theosophists have a real contribution to make to philosophy, or to religion, it is much to be regretted that they do not speak the same language as other people, so that other honest searchers after truth may have an opportunity of appraising their results and adopting their conclusions when they are seen to be worthy of credence.

Let us, for the moment, assume that we are speaking a common language. Throughout the history of religion it has been found that men have craved for the knowledge of God: however faulty their conception of Him, they have yearned after Him as after some being outside of and higher than themselves: they have persistently looked for some kind of response from Him to their aspirations, and many ways have been imagined, or invented, for approaching Him and perceiving that response. The Christian religion is based upon the conviction that the response has been made, and God has revealed Himself. At first the revelation was partial and limited, but as widespread as the human race.

It was made through nature and through conscience, which latter, however, uninstructed, is able to perceive—at least, to some extent—the divine distinction between good and evil. Then came the fuller revelation to the Hebrew prophets, by which they were made aware, by vivid and first-hand knowledge, of the unity and the holiness of God. But the crowning response of God to the needs of man, His crowning revelation of Himself, is the Incarnation. Man could not ' by searching find out God ' ; but God made Himself known to man : at first dimly, and from afar, as the One God ; then more clearly in the wondrous nearness of the Incarnation, as the Father and the Son ; and at last, as Christians indwelt by the Spirit of God, gazed on the facts of revelation, they found themselves involved in believing that the one God was Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—a Trinity in Unity.

This revelation far transcends anything that human reason could devise ; but once given, reason may dwell on it, and formulate it in terms of human thought. Thus it has been said that the argument for the Divine Personality is based on an analysis of human personality. Dr. Illingworth describes the primary characteristics of human personality as being (1) self-consciousness, (2) the power of self-determination, or free will, (3) the action of the will upon material supplied by desire ; or, in other words, (1) reason, the subject, (2) desire supplying an object, (3) will effecting a relation between the two. Here is a trinity, imperfect and, as it were, undeveloped, but at least the beginnings of a three in one, as the

beginnings of reason are to be found in the lower animals and the beginnings of sensation in plant-life. We shall not expect a lesser stage of development in the Divine than in the human. Further, man is a moral being, and, to a degree often overlooked, all knowledge—even that of the natural sciences—has a moral element. A man, for instance, who is not patient, persevering, and, above all, sincerely and uncompromisingly honest in his inquiries, will make little real advance in any branch of knowledge. All these are moral qualities. For the intimate knowledge of a person, still more is required —namely, a certain sympathy with and the moral power to appreciate—at least to some extent—his character, and an act of will to make these effective. God is holiness and love; and to know God, therefore, demands a certain moral affinity with holiness and love, and a life-long effort of will in this direction. If these moral qualities are entirely absent, there may be a sense in which it is true that God is unknowable.[1]

The Incarnation is the central fact of Christian theology; and in contemplation of it, we realise that the Divine Personality is not merely a replica on an extended scale of human personality: it is Personality *par excellence*, the real ultimate Being of which our human life is but a dim reflection. We have spoken of the discovery of the Unity of God: among the Jews by direct intuition; among the Indians, Greeks, and others, by a slow process of

[1] The above passage is mainly derived from Dr. Illingworth's *Personality, Human and Divine*.

philosophic inquiry. We have also seen that human personality contains, as it were, the germ of a trinity. It is in the light of the Incarnation that we are able to see whither both these lines of thought are tending, and to behold a true Trinity in Unity in the Godhead. Let us consider farther what we know of human personality at its highest, and of the threefold self-consciousness which is found in it. We can restate this trinity in terms of consciousness as follows: When I decide to do anything, I (*a*) am conscious of myself—*i.e.* that I (*b*) can do it, or ought to try to; and then I send myself—*i.e.* I (*c*) do it. The same thing happens when we love. Love is the highest kind of consciousness and the highest kind of activity; and, as we reflect on this, we begin to get light as to the nature of the limitations and imperfections of human personality, and the reason that the word is so apt to connote limitations to our minds. Our personality is imperfect in that our consciousness of ourselves is only a small part of our whole consciousness; for we are conscious of innumerable other persons outside ourselves; and if we turn our attention from these, and concentrate it all on ourselves, our personality is still farther dwarfed, stunted, and impoverished. We need to reach out to other persons in order to fulfil our own being. When, therefore, I love, there is (1) I who love, (2) someone else whom I love, and (3) the act of giving myself away to that person in love. This last is the essence of love in its highest sense: the desire to get gratification for oneself from the object of love is often all that human beings are conscious

of; but it is not the real thing. For we are not made to find our perfection in ourselves, but in loving God and our fellows. Hence, the chief characteristic of our personality is that it is a capacity for giving ourselves to others, outside ourselves, and especially to God. But with the Divine Perfect Being, in whose image we are made and of whose Personality ours is but a faint reflection, it is otherwise. There is nothing outside of Himself to which He must reach forth for the completion of His Being. His Personality is complete and perfect in itself: being not one isolated and separate Person, but a Trinity of Persons. Being conscious of Himself—that is, the Father of the Son, who is His expressed image—He is conscious of the infinitely perfect Being, beyond whom is no life, and in and through whom is all possible life and goodness and beauty. Hence the whole consciousness of God is filled with this expression of Himself. And because He whom He contemplates is God, the perfect goodness, He loves Him—that is, His whole Being is poured forth in love for Him and in active desire that this perfect life should be given to all who can receive it. This love of God—God thus giving Himself—is His Spirit, 'Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son—*i.e.* who is the result, so to speak, of the fact that God is Himself both Subject and Object;—just as the love which binds two human persons together is the result of the fact that they see beauty, each in the other. The nature of God's love is manifested to *us* through the Father sending His Son to save us—that is, to fill us with Himself—

and through the Son's willingness to give Himself wholly, that the Father's glorious life may be known and loved and possessed by all men. If we reflect on this in the light of what we know of our own personal consciousness, we can at least dimly see that this threefold consciousness of God must be the perfection of Personality, eternal and unlimited.

And it is this Supreme Personal God who invites us into union with Himself, so close and intimate that the very thought of a hierarchy of intermediary beings becomes an intrusion. Created beings of an order other than human there certainly are, and part of their service to their Creator consists in ministering to the sons of men; but in no sense are they intermediary beings between the human soul and God. This will be discussed more fully in the next chapter. When we speak of God as Father, we mean that He is so in actual fact; for He communicates His life to us in the Sacrament of regeneration, and thus makes possible for us a true personal union with Himself. In a general sense, God, the Creator of heaven and earth, is the Father of all men, for all life is His gift; but in a very special and definite sense He is the Father of those who are born into His family. Here is real Fatherhood and therefore real brotherhood. For those who are made partakers in the life of the Blessed Trinity, God the Father is the end of all their desires; God the Son (or God expressed) is their immediate Hierophant and Guru; God the Holy Ghost (or God given) is the Light-bringer;—and these Three are One.

CHAPTER V

THE LOGOS

MENTION has been made in the first chapter of the use made by Theosophists of the term Logos. They postulate a supreme impersonal Being, spoken of as It ; and below this a lesser Being, apparently personal, who is a kind of pseudo-God for the solar system. The idea appears to be an amalgam of two originals : (1) the Hindu doctrine of the impersonal divine essence Brahman (neuter), and the personal Brahmā (masculine) emanating from it ; and (2) the Gnostic doctrine of the Abyss and the Demiurge, already described. But the application of the term Logos to this pseudo-God is not accurate ; for the word comes to us in English with an august history behind it : it has acquired a precise significance, and is not capable of being used to cover any vague conception of a cosmic entity. It is scarcely possible to use it intelligently to-day without some knowledge of its history, and this history shows us two distinct sources. As it is a Greek word we will begin with its descent on the Greek side.

The Stoics—an ancient school of Greek philosophers founded three centuries before Christ—

conceived of the universe as a kind of organism, with a rational principle acting through it and directing it to rational and moral ends. This directing principle they called the Logos. The word *logos*, in ordinary Greek, stands for both *reason* and *word*. The Stoics distinguished between the two by qualifying adjectives : one was unspoken thought, the other was thought expressed in word. They thought of the Logos of the universe as the former—as Reason quickening and informing matter ; or, as we might put it in terms of modern thought, as immanent law in the universe.

The ancestry on the other side is Hebrew. We saw in the last chapter that the Hebrews' conception of God was that of a Personal Being, transcendent not immanent ; and their vivid realisation of His holiness made them think of Him as far removed from men, ' dwelling in the thick darkness that no man may approach unto.' But the darkness was pierced by flashes of light, and from time to time God made Himself known to man : sometimes in ' an earthquake ' or ' a fire,' when terrible punishments pursued the guilty ; sometimes in ' a still small voice,' when ' the Word of the Lord came ' unto a prophet. Gradually, later Jewish writers in Palestine came to use the word *Memra* (Word) as a technical term denoting the manifestation of the Divine Will, whether in action or in inspiration. It was not conceived of as personal, but as the manifestation of a Personal God. It should be remembered that while the Greek *Logos* denotes immanent Reason, the Hebrew *Memra*—developed

from the earlier Old Testament idea—denotes transcendent Word. The Jewish Wisdom writers, who wrote in Greek, had in their *Sophia* (Wisdom) an idea which more nearly approached the Greek conception of Reason, though it was not identical with it.

The fusion of these two ideas—the Greek and the Hebrew—was attempted by Philo. Philo was an Alexandrian Jew, who lived in the first half of the first century. By birth and religion a Jew, he was a Hellene by thought and education. He was immersed in the Greek thought of the day, and his conception of the Logos was the Greek one. He was familiar with the Jewish Scriptures in the Greek translation, the Septuagint ; and he appears to have assumed that the Greek conception of the Logos, as he knew it, could be identified with the idea running through the Old Testament, and he accordingly borrowed terms from the latter and applied them to the former. He thus spoke of the Logos not only as the Wisdom of God, but as the Eikon, or Image, the Paraklete, the Shekinah—even the vice-regent. In other words, he tried to read the Greek idea into the Hebrew Scriptures, and borrowed Hebrew terms for the Greek conception, and thus achieved—at least, to some extent—a fusion of the two lines of thought. The result was, that in Alexandrian Judaism, the term Logos stood for either kind of manifestation of the otherwise unknown God, and included the two ideas, of Reason as manifested in purpose, or Word as manifested in revelation. But the conception

was still philosophical rather than religious, and there was no thought of personality in the Logos.

And then into the midst of the speculations of men came the stupendous fact of the Incarnation. 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.' There was no longer any need to grope dimly after ideas that might perhaps seem to approximate to the Truth. Men were privileged to see and hear for themselves. The very Logos was in the midst of them, using the true nature of a man to reveal Himself without possibility of misunderstanding. After long pondering on the tremendous thing that had happened in their midst, after entering into close and intimate union with the human Friend whom they had discovered to be Divine, S. John at last found words in which to write of it. 'That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life. . . . That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you also.' It should be borne in mind that S. John was not a Greek with a literary inheritance of fanciful, poetic legends of the gods walking among men. He was a Jew—a member of a rigidly, almost fiercely, monotheistic race ; and he and others found convincing reason to believe that the Man whom they first knew as a teacher and a friend—as the kinsman, too, of some of them—was the very God whom they worshipped as transcendent and supreme. And so they gradually realised that the partial manifestations of the days of old, the voice of creation,

the theophanies, the Word of the Lord that came to the prophets, were all leading up to this final and complete manifestation of God to man; and so, when S. John wrote his account of the life of Jesus of Nazareth, he introduced the subject of his narrative in the tremendous words: 'The Word was God.' 'The Word became flesh.'

S. John wrote in Greek: he therefore used the word Logos; but he used it to translate the Hebrew *Memra*, and with the connotations which this word implied to a Jew. It was among the Jews that the Incarnation took place, and the Jewish religion was the outcome of a progressive revelation by God directly designed to lead up to and provide a suitable environment for the Incarnation. Whether S. John was acquainted with the writings of Philo, or not, cannot be decisively determined; but scholars are of opinion that he owed to him no part of what has been called 'the Logos doctrine.' S. John never uses Logos in the sense of the Divine Reason, though this secondary idea is included as a part of what he intends to convey. To quote Bishop Westcott, 'The Word, as personal, satisfies every partial conception of the Logos.' The Logos, then, according to S. John, is He who was afterwards declared in the definitions of the Church to be the second 'Person' of the Blessed Trinity: 'God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God.' In relation to the Father, we may think of Him as God manifesting or uttering Himself. He is 'the effulgence of his glory, and the very image of his substance'; or, as the Greek might be better

translated, ' the expression of his essence.' In relation to the world, we may think of Him under a threefold activity : He is the Agent in creation, the true Demiurge. ' All things were made by him ; and without him was not anything made that hath been made.' He also continually sustains the universe thus created, and may be said to be immanent in it in so far as this expression can be used consistently with the idea of the transcendent Personality. ' Upholding all things by the word of his power.' ' In him all things consist.' And also, He is the final end for which all things were created, to which they tend, and in which they have their consummation. ' Of him, and through him, and unto him, are all things.' Lastly, in relation to the human soul, He is the immediate Hierophant and Guru. There is no need for the intervention of intermediary beings, whether Aeons, or Masters, or Buddhas ; the very Logos Himself admits the soul to initiation and to a close and progressive union with Himself. It is equally accurate to say that the neophyte is born into Christ, when he receives the new birth by which he becomes a member of Christ's mystical body, and to say that Christ is mystically born in the soul of the neophyte, for the new life which he receives *is* Christ. S. Paul, writing to his Galatian disciples, describes the early development of this new life in the individual : ' My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you. . . .' And writing to the Ephesians, he speaks of its corporate consummation in the perfected Church : ' Till we all

attain . . . unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.' It should be observed in passing that the word 'mystical,' in this connection, does not at all mean unreal: it denotes reality in the sense that is known to *mustai*, initiates—reality, that is, on a higher plane, and so of a higher order than that which is known to the ordinary man on the material plane.

We can now proceed to the Christian doctrine of the *pleroma*, and compare it with that of Gnosticism. *Pleroma* is a Greek word, derived from a verb meaning to fill, and also to fulfil or complete. It has a passive significance, and is connected with the second meaning of the verb, and thus can be rendered into English as plenitude, totality, fullness, complement, etc. This is the meaning that underlies its various usages in classical Greek. S. Paul uses the word in a theological sense of the aggregate or totality of all the Divine powers and attributes. It would seem that the term was also in use among the Judaic-Gnostics of Colossae; but that they conceived of the *pleroma* as broken up into fragments, and the various Divine powers and attributes as emanating separately from the Supreme Godhead, and becoming or inhabiting each a separate aeon. Thus, perhaps, they represented the aeon Jesus as manifesting a single power or fraction of the *pleroma*. The theory is not unlike that of the *Shaktis*, or 'powers' of God, held by a certain modern sect of Hinduism. The aeons were arranged in ranks, to which were assigned various

names—such as thrones, dominions, principalities, powers, etc. The order seems to have varied in different lists. Taken together, all these constituted the *pleroma*. S. Paul most emphatically repudiates this theory. The main theme of his letter to the Colossians is that in the Person of Christ alone dwells the entire fullness—the *pleroma*—of the Divine nature, with all its powers and attributes. He alone is worthy of all worship, and it is not to be shared even with the angels. 'It was the good pleasure of the Father that in him should all the fullness (the *pleroma*) dwell.' 'In him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden.' 'In him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.'[1] This last word emphasises the exceeding greatness of the mystery of the Incarnation. Not only is the *pleroma* contained in the Logos, as He 'was from the beginning,' but when He became man, He so raised and perfected human nature as to make of His sacred Humanity also a vehicle for the Divine attributes. As the bodily Resurrection was a sign of His final triumph over all the ruin wrought by sin, so the bodily Ascension was a sign, suited to the conditions of those to whom it was given, of His taking of the Manhood into God. In Him, in His twofold nature of perfect God and perfect Man, seated at the right hand of the Father, dwelleth all the *pleroma*. And it is from this fullness of the Godhead that He grants the risen life to men as they are able to receive it. 'Of his fullness have all we received,' says S. John. This

[1] Col. ii. 9.

leads us to a farther stage in the mystery. We have spoken of the Church as the Body of Christ. So real is this relationship that there is literally no limit to the outpouring of the Divine Life with which he desires to fill her. His ideal for the Church is that she should be literally filled with Christ, that she should manifest His powers and attributes until she actually becomes herself His *pleroma*. This is the theme of S. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. 'The Church, which is his body, the fullness (*pleroma*) of him that filleth all in all.'[1] 'That ye may be filled unto all the fullness of God.' 'Till we all attain . . . unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.' This is the ideal for the Church, when she arrives at perfection. It is very far from being a description of her present state. But the perfection of Christ is absolute now and ever. He is eternally the *pleroma* of the Divine nature.

This is very different from the Gnostic conception of separate attributes and powers: a conception which was, before long, developed to include the idea of locality. Early Gnostic writers, speaking of the temporary descent of the aeon Christ upon the man Jesus, describe him as having flown back again into his own *pleroma*. The aeons, or principalities and powers and the like, are thought of as inhabiting a certain locality or region, and this region is identified with the *pleroma*. Later, in the system of

[1] [Or more probably 'the fulfilment of Him who, all in all, is being fulfilled. See Dr. Armitage Robinson's *Commentary on Ephesians* i. 23.—ED.]

Valentinus, the topographical idea is fully developed. The *pleroma* is the abode of the aeons. They are debarred from approaching the Supreme, the Abyss, by a Horos, Boundary. Another Boundary shuts off the outer space, called for distinction the Kenoma, or void, the scene of the creative activities of the Demiurge, and the sphere of the human race. We almost seem to see a map spread out before us, with God inhabiting one region and His attributes another. The whole conception is on a completely different plane from the Christian doctrine of the *pleroma.*

One more point remains to be discussed. The Gnostics were undoubtedly searching after truth: they were not wilfully fabricating deceptions; but, having missed the One Guide to Truth, their imagination ran riot and led them into all sorts of fantastic perversions of fact. The human intellect is a dangerous guide when it gets outside its own sphere —which, after all, is a very limited one. The point that remains is concerned with the hosts of intermediary beings with which the Gnostics and others have peopled the unseen world. Without any doubt, other orders of intelligent beings do exist besides the human race. The Catholic Church is well aware of their existence. Where she differs from Gnostics, ancient and modern, is in the fact that she emphatically denies that they are objects of worship, or that they are in any sense intermediary between the soul and God. When the rays of the Divine Love, burning on and on unquenchably, at last pierce through the clouds of

human indifference, and the soul is quickened to response, and begins to set forth upon its great adventure, it is a deplorable thing if others, less than the highest, claim its allegiance, and it turns aside from the true Hierophant and Light-bringer to seek pseudo-initiation at the hands of other created beings. It is part of the teaching of the Christian Church that God serves us in many ways through the instrumentality of 'angels'—beings of a higher order of nature than our own. In the Epistle to the Hebrews they are described as 'ministering spirits sent forth to do service for the sake of them that shall inherit salvation.' They perfectly serve and worship God, and part of their service consists in ministry to and guardianship of men. But the Bible always makes it abundantly clear that they are ministers only, whom God uses for our service, as He uses human agents too. They are not intermediaries between us and God in the Gnostic sense. The initiation that the Christian receives is given directly by the Incarnate Logos Himself—the great High Priest. 'No man,' He says Himself, 'cometh unto the Father but by me.'

This is the first difference between the Christian doctrine of the angels and the Gnostic and Theosophic doctrines about the various orders of suprahuman beings. The next difference is that Christians are provided with no directions for entering into communication with them. We receive their ministry, for the most part, quite unconsciously; and this is a different thing from endeavouring to get into touch with some particular

angel for the sake of seeking enlightenment or offering worship. We are in possession of a certain amount of information about the angels—though, at present, not very much. It seems certain, from the description given of the worship in heaven, that the time will come when we shall know much more. About discarnate evil intelligences, we know still less than about the angels; but the fact that they exist may throw some light upon the reserve which we believe is at present imposed upon us with regard to the spirit world. That man is capable of receiving impressions from without, independently of the use of any of the five senses, is now a matter of common knowledge; but deliberately to develop a state of sensitiveness on the psychic plane, without proper safeguards, is a highly dangerous proceeding. It is well known that it is peculiarly difficult to detect the source of impressions received in this way, and examples abound of persons thinking they were in direct communication with a departed friend, or a responsible 'control,' or a 'Master,' or a saint in heaven, when all the time they were the victims of a grave hallucination. Whether the impressions came from the automatic action of their own minds, or by telepathic messages consciously or unconsciously sent by another man, or from some malicious 'elemental' or 'evil spirit,' it is generally quite impossible to determine. In any case, especially the last, the consequences may be irretrievably disastrous. Nor is it only the beginner who is subject to hallucination. On the contrary, if an

experimenter is deceived in the early stages as to the source of his communications, it is more than likely that, as he becomes an expert, increased efficiency will only render his delusion more fixed and terrible. Scientific precautions do a good deal to eliminate error; but every occultist knows that the only way of exploring the psychic plane in complete safety lies in the guidance of a Guru, in whom he can have absolute confidence both as to ability and as to moral intention. No human being wholly satisfies these requirements, for human beings are themselves liable to error. But in Christ, the Christian has his perfect Guru; and if he submits to his guidance, he is not only directed how far to go in matters psychic, and checked when illusion begins to entangle him, but he is also gradually trained to function on the spiritual plane, until this higher activity becomes habitual to him. In this way there is no limit to the development to which he may attain; while at the same time he is under a protection which never fails when he is beset by the subtle attacks of spiritual foes.

The place which the orders of angelic beings occupy in the Divine economy is for the most part beyond the scope of our present knowledge—as some part, at least, of God's plan of redemption for man is beyond theirs: 'which things the angels desire to look into.' But that they are included in the Divine purpose for the final consummation of all things, we are well convinced. Of all orders of intelligent beings, whatever such there may be, it appears probable that man is the lowest; and

when the stupendous fact of the Incarnation took place, it was to the lowest that the Logos descended, 'that he might fill all things.' 'For verily not of angels doth he take hold, but he taketh hold of the seed of Abraham.'[1] And as 'the dispensation of the mystery' proceeds, it is the Divine purpose 'that now, unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places, might be known through the Church the manifold wisdom of God.'[2] And at last, in 'the fullness of the times,' it is 'the mystery of his will . . . to sum up all things in Christ—the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth.'[3] Rank upon rank, tier upon tier, the various orders of created beings, all perfectly fulfilling the purpose for which they were created, shall worship and adore 'the Lamb that hath been slain,[4] now 'seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high,' that Christ may 'be all in all.'[5]

[1] Heb. ii. 16. [2] Eph. iii. 10. [3] Eph. i. 9, 10.
[4] Rev. v. 6. [5] Col. iii. 11.

CHAPTER VI

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

THE above is not an expression that commends itself to the Theosophist: for him there is no sin, in the Christian sense, and no forgiveness in any sense. This will be clear from the account given of *karma*, and of the nature of man in the first chapter. Duty varies with the stage of development of the individual, and a sense of personal sin is apt to appear weak and degrading. Forgiveness is assumed to mean some kind of arbitrary release from the inexorable laws of *karma*, and, as such, is dismissed as pure delusion. This rejection of the Christian doctrine of forgiveness is a logical deduction from the Theosophic conception of God and the doctrine of *karma*; but the ease with which it is made is no doubt due to an imperfect understanding of what is really implied by the Christian formula. It may be observed in passing that the expression forms a clause in the Christian Creed, and that, consequently, any system that finds no place for it, is an un-Christian system. This can hardly be repeated too often in view of the oft-made claim that Theosophy is not opposed to Christianity.

The Christian conception of sin depends on the

Christian conception of God, which has already been outlined. God is the one Supreme Personal Being, whose ceaseless activity consists in love, the giving forth of Himself. This love caused Him to create man, and to endow him with free will, and render him capable of returning his love, and of fulfilling the object of his being by entering into close and personal union with his Maker. The nature of God, which is perfect love, is the norm for man; and all the various forms of holiness are aspects of love. But man fell away from the norm. He misused his free will, and ceased to employ it to choose only good—*i.e.* that which is consonant with the Will of God—and chose evil—*i.e.* that which is opposed to the Will of God. The result was twofold. First, his power of free will was impaired. He became unable to choose only good, as before; his nature was damaged and became prone to evil;—in fact, his will was no longer wholly free. Secondly, his relations with God were impaired. He had deliberately put himself out of the state of union for which he was created, and alienated himself from God. All this is told in allegory in the story of the Garden of Eden. We speak of what is there described as the Fall of Man: by which is meant that human nature suffered change, and passed into a condition of sin. We can thus think of sin under two aspects: it is a condition of depravity of will, and it is a condition of alienation from God. Every child born into the world inherits this damaged will-power, with its tendency to make wrong acts of choice; and this condition we call

the state of original or birth sin. Any act dictated by the depraved will, which is out of harmony with the Will of God, is an act of sin. It is not only injurious, since it is opposed to man's highest good and tends still further to damage his nature, but it also increases his condition of alienation from God—and this, when it is realised, carries with it a sense of personal guilt. The need is therefore twofold: first, for the removal of the barrier between the soul and God, created by the accumulated sins of the past—in other words, for the cleansing of the soul; this is technically called reconciliation—not, as it is sometimes cruelly misrepresented, the reconciliation of a vengeful Creator to a stricken creature, but the reconciliation of the soul to the Father, whose love it has been shutting out. And secondly, there is need for the infusion of a new power into the damaged and weakened nature to enable it to resist future temptations and gradually to conquer sin; and the new power that alone can effect this restoration is nothing less than the life of God Himself. This twofold need is met in what is known as the Atonement—the one-ing or uniting of man to God.

Few aspects of the Christian Faith have been more deplorably misrepresented and misunderstood than the doctrine of the Atonement. Some have taken it to mean that man had incurred a debt to a relentless God, who exacted the payment in full, but without much regard to who paid it The debt consisted of some kind of personal affront, and the payment exacted was suffering and death.

Man owed the debt, and Christ paid it; the punishment was inflicted on the guiltless, and the guilty gets off free. Others have even gone so far as to say that the payment was made to Satan to redeem mankind: which is equivalent to saying that Christ recognised the right of Satan to hold mankind in bondage. Both these are utterly false views of the Atonement. The first is a survival from Rabbinical theology; the second strongly savours of Mithraic dualism. Neither is Christian. But it is an unfortunate fact that one or the other has often been attributed to Christianity—even by Christian teachers; and thus the true instinct which has led many to repudiate such travesties of the truth has led them also into the mistake of repudiating Christianity as a whole. What actually was effected by Christ in the Atonement is a mystery that far transcends the power of the human mind to grasp in its entirety; but after many centuries of prayerful meditation, the Catholic Church has learnt at least something of what was and still is being effected. It may be thought of under three aspects: (1) Christ took upon Him human nature in its entirety, but without the taint of sin. Throughout His life and death, He perfectly submitted His human will to the Will of God, and used it on every occasion to make only those acts of choice which were in accordance with the Will of God. For this He had to meet and overcome all the temptations to sin that were capable of being brought against His human nature: by its own natural inclination, even at its best, to go its own

way ; by the strong tendency towards evil, inherent in the fallen human race of which He made Himself the head ; and by the whole assemblage of evil spirits who fought against Him, the more desperately the more He opposed them. Hence, the price Christ paid to make human nature obedient can only be known fully by Him, who, because He was entirely sinless, could bear the whole force of temptation to the very end. It is indicated to us by the story of His Life and Passion and Death. Thus for the first time in the history of the race, a perfect human life was lived, and the end for which man was made was perfectly fulfilled. In the perfected human nature, united wholly with the Divine Nature, Christ gives Himself to man, and so pours Himself into those who will receive Him that their wills, too, receive power to begin the long fight with sin, and to end it in victory. This is the true meaning of redemption—the complete and costly victory of Christ's human will over the whole power of sin, and, in consequence, potential deliverance for all men. (2) And, moreover, Christ has actually effected that reconciliation between God and man, which was made necessary by sin. The presentation to God of a perfect humanity, and the infusion into man, through this humanity, of the Divine Life, does actually remove the barrier which kept man back from union with God. Man in Christ is no longer alienated. (3) But each man's will is still his own, and must co-operate in his salvation. As he was not forced to fall, so he is not—because he cannot be—forced to be restored ; and until he learns

to hate sin, to loathe it, and turn from it with all the will-power that he has, the Atonement, though 'full, perfect, and sufficient,' can avail nothing for him. And this turning from sin is not easy or natural to man. Indeed, the mere admission of the existence of sin is to many utterly repugnant. Human pride and human selfishness alike shrink from all approach to penitence. But penitence is the only way. And as a pure mother grieves over an erring son, and feels the shame of his sin as if it were her own, and repents for him until by her love and grief he is brought to repent for himself, so Christ the Saviour becomes a sinless Penitent for man, feeling, just because He is sinless, the utter horror of the sin which sits so lightly on the sinner; and so He goes on loving and bearing to the uttermost, until at last one and another is broken down in sorrow for his own sin, and seeks the gift that shall give him strength to renounce it. Vicarious penitence is the third aspect of the Atonement.

This brings us to the application of the Atonement to the individual. As regards his part, penitence is the only way. There is no arbitrary remission of penalties justly incurred, no fictitious undoing of what is really done, no bartering of justice. It is the painful remaking of a man's character that is to result from forgiveness: the straightening of the distorted will; the slow growth of the God-given life within; the enlightening of the conscience; the breaking down of old bad habits, and the persevering development of good ones; a lifelong struggle to surrender the whole nature to the will of God, and

to use it in His service. The process is twofold: on man's part, repentance; on God's, forgiveness. Repentance begins with a genuine sorrow for sin: not remorse for the consequences, nor shame at exposure, but a genuine sorrow for the sin itself. This is an experience which those who have never known it are not in a position to estimate. They may incline to despise it as an unworthy depreciation of the dignity of human nature; but when at last it comes to one who has long lived without it, as it came to S. Paul at the vision of the Holy One, it is wont to bring with it such sharp and penetrating pain that to find relief from sin becomes thereafter a compelling necessity to be attained at the cost of any humiliation and any effort. This experience of what is called the sense of sin has been common to vast multitudes of the human race. It springs from the vision of holiness; it deepens as love for the sinless Saviour deepens; and its reality is proved by the transformation of character that is its invariable result. To deny such a persistent experience of humanity cannot deprive it of reality: rather the denial convicts those who make it of a very faulty diagnosis of human nature. We should look with grave doubt upon any religious system that, having no remedy to offer for the awful disease of sin, attempts to cover its deficiency by offering opiates to lull the soul into believing that it needs no remedy. The soul that has learnt to repent, refuses opiates. It recognises and confesses not only sinfulness in general, but also its own special and particular sins; and it faces the future with

firm resolve to struggle against those sins and overcome them, and, humbly, ready to bear whatever penalty they may have entailed. The forgiveness with which God meets repentance looks both backward and forward. By it, He removes the guilt of the past, and restores the soul to that state of union with Himself which its own acts had interrupted; and He also grants a fresh infusion of divine strength with which to renew the victorious struggle of the future. God is, and has been always, ready to do this for all men. He does not need to be induced to do it; but He can only do it when man's will has repented, and has turned from sin to desire to serve Him.

This is the meaning of the Atonement. It will be seen that it is part of the Incarnation, and it was accomplished by sacrifice. This Sacrifice of Christ was the sacrifice of His human will carried on consistently throughout His life on earth, and culminating in the final act of sacrifice upon the Cross. The law of sacrifice is fundamental in all human life; but the word has been popularised in modern use and made to cover a wide range of meanings. If we want to get at the root idea underlying it, we must go back to sacrifice as it is found in primitive forms of religion. There it is usually taken to include two ideas: (1) an act of communion with the god; (2) the offering of a life to the god, the life of the victim—that is, to represent the worshipper. The connection between these two ideas has been explained in various ways. We shall probably not be wrong if we take the root idea to be that of union

of man with God. The ideal union is represented by the sacrificial meal eaten by the worshipper together with, or in the presence of, the god, and therefore symbolic of unimpaired communion. When the union is impaired—a condition recognised by religious instinct long before it is formulated in religious language—the separated life must be surrendered or re-surrendered, detached from that which holds it back, and poured out before the god. In itself, sacrifice should not be painful: it would be pure joy if humanity had never fallen away from the ideal for which it was created. It is the restoration of fallen nature in face of the opposition of all its depraved appetites and instincts that introduces the element of suffering. And humanity does not consist of an aggregate of separate individuals: it is a corporate whole, and therefore the suffering is corporate. God is Love; and the nearer any individual is to union with God the more he is able to experience love—that quality which consists in giving itself forth to others. Thus the nearer any individual is to God, the more he will voluntarily give himself to share the corporate sufferings of the race, and to help to promote the restitution of the race. This introduces the idea of substitution into sacrifice. The corporate nature of our humanity makes vicarious suffering inevitable; voluntary vicarious suffering for a noble end rises to the level of sacrifice. And all these aspects of sacrifice are perfectly fulfilled by Christ, and by Him alone. Had there been no Fall, we may believe there would still have been the Incarnation, and Christ would have

communicated the Divine Life to man, who would have received it joyfully and painlessly. The presence of sin causes man to misunderstand and refuse the good gift offered him, or, at least, to accept it very imperfectly. The work of Christ thus becomes a sacrifice full of suffering and struggle. Weaker wills give in when the limit of their endurance is reached. Christ alone endured to the very end the utmost bitterness of all the assaults of sin, and therefore suffered as no one else could suffer.

It is now possible to compare the salvation accomplished by Christ with that ascribed to the so-called Saviours of Gnosticism and similar systems, or to the Great Ones of Theosophy. Christ effectively restored human nature by living in it without sin. He united the human nature thus restored to the Divine nature; and through His perfected humanity He now communicates the Divine Life to man, and thus makes it possible for man to renounce sin and live the life of union with God, for which he was created. All this He has accomplished in virtue of being in His one Person both 'perfect God and perfect Man.' The aeon Jesus of Gnosticism, on the other hand, was, according to the Docetists, never really man at all: his manhood was only a semblance. According to the more general Gnostic teaching, he was only an ordinary man up to the Baptism; and after that, his special work was accomplished by an overshadowing intermediary being, who was neither the supreme nor truly human—in fact, neither God nor man. The Christ of Theosophy is similarly an overshadowing inter-

mediary being. Nor is it clear what was accomplished by the descent of this being. At the most, according to Gnosticism, he seems to have revealed to men, or to certain of them, their capacity for restoration to the pleroma, and to have shown how the spiritual could be dissociated from the material when he himself ultimately returned thither; but it is difficult to see how this could effectively have benefited mankind in his admitted state of bondage. Indeed, no claim is made that he was so benefited; for the Gnostic doctrine of salvation is obliged to fall back upon the other doctrine of reincarnation. In other words, there is no salvation provided for man: he must work it out for himself through an unlimited series of incarnations. Gnosticism, in thus assuming the theory of reincarnation, is its own most damaging critic. It has no scheme of salvation to offer, and the term 'Saviour' is merely borrowed from Christianity. The same criticism applies to the World Teachers or Bodhisattvas of Theosophy. The highest that can be postulated of them is—as their name implies—that they offer teaching and enlightenment and, perhaps, example—to men. Teaching and example are, of course, profitable in their degree; but they do not transcend in essence what one man can give to another—and human nature needs something that does transcend this. Teaching, and power to follow the teaching, are essentially different things. It is of little use to show a paralysed man the movements of walking, or tell him of the delight that can come from the

use of his limbs: he needs power to arise and walk. And human nature needs not only teaching or enlightenment, or even a perfect exemplar: it needs the infusion of new life, the gift of something that is outside itself.

From what has been said of the Christian doctrine of forgiveness, it will be seen that it is something fundamentally opposed to the doctrine of *karma*. It is often objected against opponents of the latter doctrine that they do not, and cannot, disprove it. This is true. It is not the kind of proposition that admits of logical proof or disproof. Christians decline to accept it not because they can logically prove it to be false, but because it is wholly irreconcilable with integral parts of the Faith of which they are convinced, and which they cannot surrender. The doctrine of *karma* appeals to many at the outset as offering a plausible solution of the apparent injustice in the world; but, as a matter of fact, the real difficulty which is experienced in giving it up, by those who have once accepted it, is mainly due to the condition of mental bias which has befallen them, to which reference has been made in an earlier chapter. If once we can rid ourselves of this mental bias, it is not difficult to see certain grave defects in the theory.

1. It offers no help to struggling humanity. The law of *karma* is utterly pitiless and mechanical in its operation. There is no escaping the fruits of *karma*. Every man must work out his own salvation unaided. It is of the nature of a universal condemnation to almost perpetual punishment of

all defaulters, without help and without mercy—an attitude which even our criminal courts of justice are outgrowing.

2. It reduces to a minimum the scope for free will in man, and regards him almost as a machine: obliged to follow out in the future the sequence of actions initiated in the past, utterly regardless of any change of will he may have experienced in the meantime.

3. It does nothing to solve the problem of human inequality, but merely pushes it farther back, and so deludes the unwary with a semblance of a solution. If it be true that man's actions are determined by his conditions, and these are themselves the result of past actions; if we trace the process continually backwards, we only arrive at the same problem in an earlier stage. What caused the first unequal conditions or the first unequal actions? If all souls started equal and alike, it is no easier to explain the first divergence than the last. If they did not start alike, then earthly inequalities—for it is those that the law of *karma* is supposed to explain—must be assumed to be inherent in the immortal soul; which things are incommensurate.

4. It makes human progress to consist in a process of emptying and destroying, not of fulfilling. All *karma*, whether good or bad, must be worked out; and as long as any remains, of any kind, there is no release from rebirth. The way of escape is therefore to abandon action, and as action is the fruit of desire, desire, too, must be

abandoned—all desire, good and bad alike. The man who is nearing release will feel nothing, do nothing, desire nothing. It is a process of stultification and of gradual death, and must of necessity remove man ever farther and farther from union with God, who is Life and Love. It may be objected that this is an unfair deduction from the doctrine of *karma*; but it is the thoroughly logical deduction, which is actually made by those among whom the doctrine was devised—the philosophers of Hinduism. The theory is an essentially Indian one, and unfairness is shown in taking it from its original setting, modifying it by the light of Christian ethics, and then setting it forth as an oriental improvement on Christianity, rather than in tracing it to its logical conclusion in its natural environment. I once asked a Benares *pandit*—a Brahman steeped in Hindu sacred learning and orthodox of the orthodox—whether he had himself ever seen a man who had worked off his *karma* and won release from rebirth; and the answer was that such were exceedingly rare, but he had seen one in his youth. The holy man sat motionless, day and night, on the banks of the Ganges; he neither spoke nor moved. It was to be assumed that he had even ceased to think; for thought is a form of action, and generates fresh *karma*. His disciples washed him, and put food into his mouth at intervals; but he showed no consciousness of what was done. He was intensely holy, a true *mukta—i.e.* 'free' from the need for rebirth. This is the ideal which is actually put forth by the *karma* system.

5. The doctrine of *karma* is wholly alien from the idea of sacrifice, which we have seen includes that of vicarious suffering. When the conception of sacrifice is introduced into a philosophy of which the *karma* theory forms an integral part, it is due to a deliberate borrowing from Christianity: the two are wholly incompatible, and any attempt to combine them into a single system must of necessity do violence to both. The Hindu *mukta* described above is a striking contrast to the Saviour who 'went about doing good,' who 'though he was a Son, yet learned obedience through the things which he suffered,' who 'was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin,' and who, as the sinless Penitent, 'hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.'

The retort is often made that Christians should have no quarrel with the solution of the problem of inequality provided by the *karma* doctrine while they have no better solution to offer themselves. The answer to this retort is a simple one. Christians make no claim to be able to solve all problems. They do not feel that the Faith which they hold is at all imperilled because there are mysteries in the universe which at present transcend the power of human intelligence to comprehend: indeed, it would be strange if it were not so; and a premature and inaccurate solution is very much worse than none at all. It is better to say, frankly, that we do not yet know, than to invent misleading explanations. Christian philosophy sees in natural law—even the law of cause and effect—

not mechanical compulsion, but rather the manner of working of the Mind that is behind law; and Christians are convinced that conditions that are beyond their control, however sorely perplexing they may be at times, are part of the great plan made by One whom they know as both Wisdom and Love. It is better to be ordered by beneficent Mind than by mechanical Law.

CHAPTER VII

THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH

One of the chief attractions of Theosophy is the promise afforded of mystical experiences: the vista opened up of stage after stage of progress into inner states of being and far realms of new and endless possibilities. 'Height after height is scaled, but there remains height after height beyond.' Increasing numbers of persons in the present day are becoming conscious of the mystical element in their nature; and it has happened to many a one that the more he has become an aspirant to a fuller life, the more he has felt himself chilled and dissatisfied with what religion, as he knows it, has to offer. The Christian Church seems to him, perhaps, an unattractive assembly of unmystical people living at a monotonous dead level of spiritual experience. He thinks he has tried it, and found it wanting. And then he is introduced to Theosophy, with its new and alluring vocabulary, its promise of the development of psychic faculties, of regular training and discipline in preparation for the Mystic Way, and at last the far vista of initiations leading on beyond, where thought can

follow ; and he believes that he has found what he was wanting. How far Theosophy has really anything substantial to offer, I have been trying to show. But why do so many assume that the Christian Church can do nothing to meet their need ? Probably one reason is that they never really try it. Without humility and strenuous effort, and the discipline of the will, spiritual progress is impossible, and the Christian athlete is of far other metal than the man who is content to be a mere casual observer. And another reason, probably, operates with many who would be capable of the necessary effort. What they see is not the Catholic Faith—the whole of Christianity—at all, but either certain selections from it, or some unworthy substitute for it, or a distorted appearance of it as travestied in the lives of unworthy exponents ; and so the very souls who would most joyously embrace the faith and obediently accept the discipline if once they saw it, are the very ones who turn away. Imperfect teaching is especially common with regard to the Church itself, so it will perhaps not be superfluous to offer a chapter on this subject ; for it is in the Church that the true initiation is to be found : and wonderful indeed is the vista that opens up before the neophyte who loyally accepts and responds to the privileges of his membership therein.

When both are really understood, the contrast between the development offered by Theosophy and the salvation given by Christ, is great and absolute. In Theosophy, man's progress consists

in the development and organisation of his higher bodies, which is attained as he learns to respond to the finer vibrations of the subtler kinds of matter of which those bodies are composed. And the different kinds of matter run into one another, as liquids can be brought into a gaseous condition: there is no difference of essence between them. There is no gift of the divine Life, but merely the development of the existing human one. There is no Saviour to give the new life, to accept the surrender of the will, and to enable man to conquer sin and attain to holiness. Man develops himself by his own effort: constantly forgetting his own past, and starting afresh with each incarnation under the control of mechanical law. There is no goal of complete personal union with God. When the will is at last wholly surrendered to God's Will, and man lives wholly the divine Life of Love, the goal is that man should himself become a kind of pseudo-god, as remote as ever from contact with the impersonal Supreme.

But the divine Life is verily and indeed given in the Church of Christ, and it is communicated by real and actual birth, which takes place in the Sacrament of Baptism. Sacrament has been defined by a modern writer as 'a supernatural conjunction of spirit and matter.' Sacraments—especially one—are the extension of the Incarnation. God gave Himself to man in the stupendous fact of the Incarnation, when He took a human body to be the vehicle of the divine Life. He goes on giving Himself to men through the ordered sequence of the

sacraments, when matter is again and again caught up to be the instrument and vehicle of spirit. The floodgates being once opened, the streams of divine Life are poured in through varied channels, that no part of human life may be left untouched. A sacrament thus consists of two parts: the spiritual gift, and the material medium through which it is communicated—'an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace,' as the Book of Common Prayer puts it; the former being 'a means whereby we receive' the latter, 'and a pledge to assure us thereof.' The sign in Holy Baptism is water—symbolic of death, since the candidate is immersed in it; symbolic of new life, since he rises out of it again; and symbolic also of cleansing. The inward and spiritual grace is real and actual death and rebirth and cleansing. Death has been described as the state of being out of relation with environment; physical death is a state of being completely out of relation with physical environment. By the 'death unto sin,' which is given in Baptism, the neophyte passes out of the relation to sin in which he was before: he is no longer immersed in it and subject to it: he has now received a new and supernatural power to contend against it and rise above it. This is only another aspect of rebirth. As formerly, he received physical birth from his human parents, and became their child, and the inheritor of human nature; so now he receives the very life of God in a spiritual birth, and becomes the child of God, and an inheritor of the new and higher nature which is sometimes called 'the Kingdom of

God.' The cleansing is also a real and actual fact. The taint of inherited sin, and the guilt of any personal sins that may have been committed before baptism, are wholly done away, and the soul makes a fresh start, cleansed and purified. 'I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins,' says the Creed of the Catholic Church. This is the first initiation of the Christian neophyte.

Birth has of necessity a twofold aspect: the individual and the corporate. When a child is born, he enters upon a separate life of his own, and he also becomes a member of a family. The same is true of Christian Regeneration. The newly born enters into direct personal relations with God his Father; he also enters the family of God, which is called the Catholic Church. One is not possible without the other. The Christian life is essentially a corporate life; and this word corporate, again, expresses an actual fact. The Catholic Church is the Body of Christ, and those initiated into it 'are members one of another.' A body is an organic whole, the various members of which share in the common life, each performing its own proper function for the good of the whole. This description is literally true of the Church of Christ: one life flows through the Body into each several part, and if any member is detached from the whole it loses its share in the common life; one head directs the whole, and directs each member as a part of the whole, and not in isolation. If there is 'schism in the body,' the well-being of the whole and of each several part is immediately impaired. The

various functions of the Body, moreover, are performed by means of special organs, and by them alone. Thus, in particular, the sacraments are validly administered by those persons who receive authority in the Church to administer them, and not otherwise.

And not only in the internal relations of the members one with another is the Catholic Church veritably the Body of Christ : it also performs the true external functions of a body. A body is that with which the person inhabiting it comes into contact with his external environment ; and it is through our bodies, and those of other people, that we, who are embodied spirits, can communicate with one another. Jesus Christ, during the thirty years of His sojourn on earth, accepted without reservation the conditions of incarnate life, and used His human body as a means of holding communication with other men. He is still seeking to reach and to enter into relations with all mankind, and He still uses a Body for the purpose, which Body is the Catholic Church. It is birth into this Body which is effected by Christian initiation.

From what we know of physical birth, it is not surprising that spiritual birth also should be commonly an unconscious process ; but life, if it be normal, soon ceases to be unconscious. It becomes active and strenuous, and needs continual support from without. A new-born infant, feeble and unconscious though it is, may be perfect of its kind ; but if it continues feeble and unconscious, it is soon looked upon as defective. So with the

Christian neophyte. He must, when he comes to years of discretion, actively live the life that has been given him, or he remains defective, and his life is of no use to himself or to others. And the Church, which is his spiritual Mother, does not leave him unprovided for as he develops. At every stage in his after-life, his special needs are met by sacraments. As he approaches the critical time of youth, when physical and intellectual powers are developing, and a boy or a girl may begin dangerously to go wrong, or steadfastly to go right, he is admitted to a second initiation—the completion of his Baptism —wherein the sevenfold gift of the Spirit is granted him, to confirm and strengthen him for the battle of life. After his Confirmation, he has passed out of spiritual infancy, and has within him that power which, if he duly uses it, will enable him to develop into Christian maturity, gradually making effective his renunciation of sin, and continually growing in holiness.

His next need is spiritual food, which the gift of the Holy Spirit has now enabled him to assimilate. This is given him in that wonderful and sublime mystery which is called, *par excellence*, the Blessed Sacrament. The very glorified Humanity of the Lord of Life Himself is communicated to the faithful that they may evermore dwell in Him and He in them. The life once given them is thus continually restored and renewed, and they enter into ever closer and closer union with Him, until at last the far advanced may even dare to say with S. Paul: 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.'

This is not the place to dwell much on these holy mysteries. They are such that no unbaptised person may even be present when they are celebrated, lest dishonour be done to the Body of the Lord. They are the innermost sacred shrine of the Christian Faith; and while outsiders may doubt and speculate, the initiated know.

Into the Presence so awful and so holy—albeit, so compelling in its love—sinful man will not rashly venture. He must prepare by penitence and reconciliation. What this means has been described in the last chapter; and for this, too, a sacrament is provided. Every sin is a sin against the Body: 'If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it.' Absolution is therefore ministered through the Body. In His solemn charge on the day of His Resurrection, Christ committed to His Church the authority to dispense that great gift of forgiveness which He had won for men: 'Whosesoever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; and whosesoever sins ye retain, they are retained.'[1] This authority, like the power to administer other sacraments, the Church exercises through its priests, who are the organs of the Body for the purpose. Here is the Church's provision for the relief of the conscience burdened with post-baptismal sin. Here is the open door by which the apostate, the lapsed, the fallen, may return, and, cleansed and strengthened, may set foot again upon the Way. For the penitent, who faithfully and humbly confesses his sins, there is always forgiveness. No one need

[1] S. John xx. 23.

despair. The gross and flagrant sinner, who sickens of his sins and longs to make a fresh start; the hardened and indifferent, who melts at last into utter self-abasement; the frail and stumbling, who keeps on falling into old sins and keeps on struggling up again; the humble saint, who, as he grows in holiness, has his conscience purified to ever deeper penitence;—each alike may find in the sacrament of reconciliation just that which meets his special need—the word of absolution for the past and the blessing which brings grace to persevere. And he finds, too, as he needs it, a safe and authorised opportunity for receiving 'ghostly counsel and advice, to the quieting of his conscience, and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness' (*vide* Book of Common Prayer). The office of *guru*, or spiritual director, is expressly recognised under the safeguards of 'the seal of Confession' by our Mother the Church; and none who seeks direction, or counsel, or instruction, in things spiritual need be at a loss as to how to seek it.

So far, we have been describing sacraments that are designed to meet the needs that are common to all. Members of the Church of England are familiar with the expression that sacraments are 'two only, as generally necessary to salvation': 'generally' meaning 'for all men in general.' This does not conflict with the description of four, given above. Holy Baptism is the entrance into the new life; the Holy Eucharist is the sustenance of that life. These are the two referred to. Further, Confirmation is the completion of Baptism: in

some parts of the Catholic Church it is given simultaneously, in others subsequently. Sacramental confession is the preparation for Communion—the means whereby the life, when impaired by sin, is continually restored, and the penitent again made fit to approach the Holy Mysteries. In some parts of the Catholic Church, it is compulsory ; the Church of England lays it on the conscience of her children to decide for themselves when and whether they will seek the grace of absolution by this means. We now come to the remaining three sacraments, which are not for all, but for some.

Christians are often addressed by S. Paul as saints : saints, that is, in the making—people who are ' called to be saints ' ; and the Christian life, both individual and social, is essentially a life of holiness. Marriage is, as it were, a natural sacrament of social purity. The inner and the outer life are here so intimately connected that the man or the woman who sins against the sanctity of marriage not only stains his own soul, but outrages society in general. This fact is partially recognised by the State. It has been known to the Church throughout its history, and with a divinely given intuition it has taken hold of marriage and raised it to the status of a sacrament of religion. Its teaching about it is explicit. There is one standard of morality for both men and women. There is no divorce. Apart from marriage, absolute continence is the rule for all. It is abundantly clear that if these rules were everywhere obeyed the most horrible of social evils that is now

devastating whole nations would be non-existent. In the sacrament of marriage, the sex relation is lifted into an atmosphere of purity and mutual love and mutual service, and an environment is provided in which the child can at least have a good start in life. And it should be remembered that in this, as in other sacraments, not only is an ideal set forth, but also inward power given by which to live up to it. As two persons enter together into the married state, with its new temptations and its new duties and responsibilities—no less than its new joys—the Church is still watching over them and ready to consecrate their new relationship with her benediction and her sacramental grace.

Sacraments are not concerned with purely physical life, but with the physical at its point of sublimation where its interaction with the spiritual is most immediate. The sacrament of healing touches sickness at its point of sublimation. Pain and sickness are part of the great mystery of evil: we cannot avoid them, we cannot destroy them; we can only seek to mitigate them, and, where they must be borne, to learn so to bear them as not to miss whatever hidden good they may conceal. And here also the sacramental system does not fail us. The writer, quoted above, says of it: 'As the object of Penance is primarily to heal the soul, and indirectly to heal the body, so the object of Unction is primarily to heal the body, and indirectly to heal the soul.' It is sometimes assumed, and urged as a proof of ineptitude against the Church, that while various forms of 'mental'

and 'faith-healing' are being offered on all sides, the Church alone pursues her way with nothing to offer but criticism of others' efforts, well satisfied with the preaching of her unpractical dogmas and unconcerned with the real needs of men. This is not the case. It is true that the sacrament of healing has been long neglected in some branches of the Church; and those Christians who allowed it to fall into neglect—and perhaps those, too, who are over slow in reviving it—may be guilty of 'neglecting the gift that is in them.' But the gift is there; and if it is not, and cannot, be recklessly and universally administered, that is a necessary result of its sacramental nature. There are many possible attitudes towards the question of healing: there is that of the Christian Scientist, who claims that all disease is abnormal, and can be removed by right thinking; there is the materialist's, who ignores the mental factor altogether and uses material remedies only with a view to material ends; there is that of the Indian adherent of the *karma* doctrine, who declares that suffering is the direct result of *karma*, and it is both presumptuous and useless to try to interfere with it; and there is the Christian's, who calls in a doctor and supports his treatment by simultaneous effort on a higher plane in prayer; and to supplement the normal processes of prayer for special needs and under special circumstances it is given to the Church to minister the sacrament of Holy Unction. Being a sacrament, it is only to be ministered where the need is partly spiritual as well as largely physical.

It is not an act of magic ; and its indiscriminate use for all sorts and conditions of pain could not be expected to bring about indiscriminate healing. That disease is the result of sin, we are certainly warranted in asserting as a general principle. The corporate liability to disease of the human race is the direct result of the corporate sin of the race ; but the relation between the two, in the case of the individual, it is commonly impossible to determine. In some cases it would seem that individual disease is due to corporate sin ; but in others it must certainly be due, though perhaps in a subtle and untraceable way, to individual sin. In our present condition of ignorance on this subject, it is generally impossible to foretell with certainty what physical result will attend the sacrament. If it be rightly received, the spiritual result may be expected with absolute conviction.

The last sacrament is that of Holy Orders, by which the Church gives both the authority and the power to dispense the sacraments to those who thereby become organs of the Body for these functions. The power is mystically transmitted, by those who already have it, to their successors, in due order and in valid sequence. Confirmation and Holy Orders are communicable by bishops only ; the other five by priests also ; and Baptism by any baptised person.

It will be seen from the above that the life of those who are initiated into the Church of Christ is by no means the dull level of commonplace monotony that is sometimes supposed. Because

a little child can enter the kingdom, it does not follow that there are no 'treasures of wisdom and knowledge' awaiting the more advanced disciple. S. Paul makes this very clear to the Corinthians, when he distinguishes between the teaching which is milk for babes, and that which is meat for the strong. 'We speak wisdom among the perfect,' *i.e.* the advanced initiates.[1] And the writer to the Hebrews instructs his readers that the time has come to 'cease to speak of the first principles of Christ, and press on unto perfection.'[2] The grace is given to press on; but the disciple must assimilate it and use it, or it remains potential merely and inoperative. If he does use it, there is no limit to the degree of spiritual development that is possible to him. He is called to be 'holy and without blemish,' 'to be filled unto all the fullness of God,' and at last to share in the glory of the perfected Church, when it has attained 'unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.'[3]

[1] 1 Cor. iii. 2, and ii. 6.
[2] Heb. vi. 1.
[3] Eph. iv. 13.

CHAPTER VIII

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

We have spoken of the fatherhood of God; and the brotherhood of man follows as a necessary sequence. It can spring from no other source. We may, of course, use the expression figuratively, or we may set up brotherhood as an ideal and attempt to practise something resembling it; but real brotherhood, as an actual fact, is impossible without a common parentage. Spiritual brotherhood between men is, therefore, in its highest and only real sense, the direct result of the fatherhood of God, and can be fully experienced by those only who have been born into the family of God. A system that denies the fatherhood of a personal God cannot logically find a place for the brotherhood of men. There is, therefore, a very curious inconsistency in the prominent place which the promotion of the brotherhood of man occupies among the three primary objects of the Theosophical Society, seeing that this object is rendered nugatory by the teaching of Theosophy about the nature of God. The inconsistency becomes the more marked when we observe in India the relations of Theosophy to Hinduism. It cannot be too often insisted upon

that a non-Christian system of religion, or ethics, cannot be fully tested in a country where public opinion has been trained for centuries by Christian teaching, and the very atmosphere is steeped in Christian ideals. People brought up in such an atmosphere are positively incapable, whatever religious views they may elect to hold, of abandoning wholly the Christian ethical standard. It is gravely misleading to repudiate their debt to Christianity and claim, without evidence or investigation, that the higher ethic is the fruit of their special system. But in a country not steeped in Christianity, it is easier to see what the tendencies of other systems really are. Take, for instance, the caste system of India—the very antithesis of brotherhood in its extremest form. It is easy to read an account of it in any book on Hinduism. It has been called the plague spot of India. Not only Christian critics, but also Hindu reformers, denounce it as the greatest obstacle in the way of the development of Indian national life. By its cruel provisions, Hindus are divided up into separate groups by impassible and degrading barriers. Not only is intermarriage prohibited outside certain fixed caste limits, but no one may eat with a fellow being who is not of his particular sub-caste. Two friends and fellow students may not sit down to dinner in the same room, if they do not happen to be of the same sub-caste: one would defile and the other be defiled by the action. It would even happen that a dirty and half-naked beggar would be defiled by the use of his own water-pot, if an

educated and cultured man of a lower caste had happened to touch it. A schoolboy has been known to throw away his dinner because the English missionary, in charge of the hostel where he lived, looked into the boy's room at that moment, in his care for him, when he was ill. A mother will pull back the hands of her children in horror, if they stretch them out to the wrong water-carrier at a station, while travelling by train with the temperature at 110°. Caste rules pursue a man in all sorts of horrible ways. A Hindu doctor has been known to look on indifferently at an English mother, whose life was in danger, because he was in mourning for his own mother, and caste rules forbade him to give the necessary assistance till the days of mourning were over. These examples give a passing glimpse of what caste means in India. It is impossible for those who have not actually seen it in operation, or perhaps for those who have not lived and suffered under it, fully to understand the cruel bondage of its grinding fetters. And Theosophy in India has deliberately identified itself with the caste system. Eloquent defences have been written of it, and it has been represented as a providential arrangement for the division of labour, for the protection of race purity, and for the working out of *karma*. English Theosophists, who desire to subscribe to an ideal of Universal brotherhood, can have little idea of what Theosophy has committed itself to in India.

But to return to the Christian conception of brotherhood. It is included in the Creed under

the expression 'The Communion of Saints.' We have already had occasion to notice that the term 'saints' does not here mean holy persons: if it did, Christians would not dare to apply it to themselves. It means those who are 'sancti,' consecrated to the service of God, and therefore in process of being made holy. In this sense Christians collectively are frequently spoken of as saints in the New Testament. The expression Communion, or fellowship, of Saints, as an article of belief, denotes that all Christians, because of their real and actual brotherhood, 'have fellowship one with another.' The ideal for the Church is that this fellowship should be absolutely all-inclusive: that there should be no difference of race or colour or sex, or even of living and so-called dead. Human infirmity finds many difficulties in the way of such fellowship, and the ideal is as yet very far indeed from being realised; but, none the less, it is the ideal set before us by Christ, and towards it we are gradually tending. At least, we know that oppression and jealousy, based on race or colour or sex, are utterly un-Christian: evils to repent of and to seek to eradicate—a conception which has never yet developed spontaneously among races untouched by Christian influence. The unchallenged prevalence of slavery, caste, and the degradation of women, among the highest civilisations that are not based on the fatherhood of a personal God, and not influenced by contact with Christian ideals, offer melancholy evidence of the truth of this statement.

The claim that the Communion of Saints includes the dead as well as the living perhaps needs further comment. They are, of course, not really dead, but have passed on into a different state of being; and the nature of the fellowship excludes those dangers which we have seen to attach to certain attempts to communicate directly with the departed. It is maintained through the one Head in whose body all are alike members, and the bond of union is intercessory prayer. The Catholic Church is one; and though some of its members are still on the earth-plane, and some have passed beyond, the one communion and fellowship is still unbroken. We have little definite information about the future life, but from the hints given us in Holy Scripture we can infer the following description of what are called 'the three states.'

The first state is that of the Church Militant here on earth, engaged in struggling against temptation, and so in fighting the world, the flesh, and the devil; whence its name. The second state has been called the Intermediate State, or that of the Church expectant: it is that of the souls of the faithful departed. We know little of this condition, but believe them to have attained to a clearer vision of many things that were obscured by the limitations of the earth life. We believe that we may follow them with our prayers; and, as our ignorance of their needs precludes detailed petitions, the Church has long used for them the beautiful and comprehensive prayer: 'Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let light

perpetual shine upon them.' Our dear ones are not lost to us while we can still serve them by our prayers.

The third state is that of the Church Triumphant: those who are wholly purified from sin, and enjoy in heaven the fullness of the beatific vision. Some description of their glory and their joy is given in the Book of Revelation. There is no hint of the abandonment of action, of the stripping off of qualities, of the loss of personality, of the dew-drop that 'slips into the shining sea.' On the contrary, there is fullness of life, perfection of service, and the joyous consummation of the Divine purpose for men. 'His servants shall do him service; and they shall see his face.' 'God himself shall be with them, and be their God.' But even the blessed Saints, amidst the joys of heaven, are still part of the Catholic Church; and we cannot believe that they are selfishly content with bliss, while their brethren are still suffering and sinning on the earth. When S. John was permitted to behold for a wondrous moment the worship of heaven, he heard the great multitude of the redeemed ascribing salvation and glory and dominion unto the Lamb; and until that salvation and dominion are completed, and every soul of man incorporated into the mystical Body of Christ, we can hardly be wrong in assuming that the Saints are doing their part in bringing this about by uniting their prayers to those of Christ, who 'ever liveth to make intercession' for us. It has from early times been the pious custom of the Church to ask the prayers of the

Saints, and to take courage from the thought that they are watching and helping our progress.

It is thus by intercessory prayer that the soul realises and takes its part in maintaining the bond of the Communion of Saints. Prayer is a subject which, like many others, can only really be learned by practice. One who has not practised long and diligently, however much he may have read, can no more dogmatise about it than one who has never handled an instrument can dogmatise about music. Such a one's criticism will not be of great value. But reading also has its place; for we may get very great help in our practising from those who are more skilled than ourselves; and it is greatly to be deplored when people discourage themselves from beginning to practise by imagining that prayer means all sorts of things which anyone who had practised, even a little, could easily assure them it does not mean. Many excellent books have been written on the subject by experts in prayer, a few of which are mentioned in the list at the end of this volume. No attempt will be made here to do more than clear the way by contrasting prayer with certain other processes with which it might perhaps be confused. In the first place, prayer is always addressed directly to God Himself, and this distinguishes it at once from a great number of other mental and psychic activities. In telepathy and hypnotism, for instance, the mind acts directly on the sub-conscious mind of another, and transmits its own ideas. In clairvoyance and clairaudience, as again in telepathy, the mind acquires information by a similar process.

For all we know, our sub-conscious minds—or ourselves functioning in the astral body, if we prefer so to call it—may be continually transmitting and receiving impressions by telepathy and clairvoyance; though it is only when these impressions are thrown up on the conscious surface of the mind that we are able to realise and discuss the result. In any case, the acquisition, transmission, and cognisance of the impressions are purely mental phenomena. Even if we regard the minds with which we are in contact as those of very exalted beings, there is no essential difference. And there is still no difference of level—though we have seen that there is an additional element of danger—if those with whom we communicate are discarnate. It is only as we enter into direct and personal touch with God that we can rise to the highest level of all, which we may call the spiritual plane. It may be convenient to group all the other mental activities, concerned with what psychologists call the supra-liminal or sub-liminal consciousness, as psychic activities, or activities on the psychic plane. But whatever name we choose to apply, it should be clearly understood that these processes, useful though they may be in their own degree, are essentially different from activity on the spiritual plane, and are no adequate substitute for prayer. It is necessary to emphasise this point; for those *who have not tried both,* and are acquainted with the psychic only, are often ready to claim that they habitually function on the spiritual plane, and that there is no higher level possible than the one with

which they are familiar. To those who have tried both, the difference is self-evident.

The next difference between Christian prayer and psychic substitutes for it is that in the latter the individual is still expressing *himself* and seeking to carry out some definite purpose of his own, just as much as when he is making use of the more ordinary processes of speech and physical action. He desires some particular result, and he sets to work to attain it; while in prayer, on the other hand, the Christian seeks to make effective the Will of God, whatever this may be, and regards himself as only an instrument of God for the purpose. It is not even necessary that he should know what the will of God is in the matter about which he is praying. He may use all the will-power of which he is capable in a supreme effort to bring about God's will, without setting any details before himself, either as to the persons or the methods by which it is to be done. He may even have to enter upon a terrible struggle to give up his own will and his own plans and opinions before he can become of use in making effective the will of God. This is very often, indeed, a necessary element in Christian prayer. It is hardly necessary to observe that many prayers offered by Christians are selfish and self-willed; but, in so far as they are so, they fall short of the true ideal of prayer, and fail of true effectiveness. The point to be noted here is that on other planes—physical, psychic, and mental—it is not possible to make a supreme effort of will without a definite conception of the particular result one desires to achieve. In

co-operating with God in prayer, it is enough that the desired result is known to Him; so that our effectiveness is not limited by our knowledge of what has to be done. This fact eliminates the possibility of doing harm by prayer, while it enhances almost without limit the possibility of doing good.

This has been a long digression; and reflection on the Communion of Saints, as overpassing the limits of the earth-life, leads us to another; for the doctrine as described above is wholly incompatible with the doctrine of re-incarnation, and this incompatibility challenges our attention. No one can hold both doctrines; and what was said before about the twin theory of *karma* applies equally here. The Christian does not disbelieve in re-incarnation because it is capable of definite disproof, but because it is inconsistent with what he does believe. It is inconsistent with the central truth of the resurrection, and with what has been made known to us of the resurrection life which Christ gives to men. When, therefore, a man puts his faith in Christ, risen, ascended, and life-giving, the re-incarnation theory simply drops away. Some years ago, a Hindu monk, a Brahman by birth and saturated in Hindu thought, was admitted into the Christian Church at Benares. He was instructed in the Faith before Baptism, and was required to renounce sin; but he was not asked to renounce any particular doctrine or theory. A year or two later, speaking of the change that had come to him, he said: 'I no longer believe in re-incarnation. I still know no arguments against it,

and I cannot tell why I no longer believe in it; but now that I am a Christian, I can't.' This experience has probably been shared by multitudes. An inevitable result of vital union with Christ is the gradual dropping off of many a theory which intellectual argument would be quite powerless to dislodge. The sphere of the intellect, as we had occasion to remark before, is a limited one. But when the theory has once lost its hold upon us, we are able to see the flaws in it. Some of the flaws of the re-incarnation theory, in addition to what was said before on the subject of *karma*, may be summarised as follows.

1. It is held—at least by those who have received the doctrine from India—that re-incarnation is a necessary hypothesis to provide a sphere for the working out of *karma*. If, therefore, the latter doctrine is discredited, the former loses its chief argument.

2. It is taken for granted that the purpose of a man's existence (if purpose can be postulated at all under the mechanical laws of *karma*) is not fulfilled for all time during the few years of a single lifetime on earth; and it is accordingly assumed that he must of necessity come back to similar conditions in this earth-life till the purpose is fulfilled. Such an assumption is wholly gratuitous. Even had we no information from which to form a different conclusion, there is not a shadow of proof in favour of this one; it is purely imaginary. It suggests, too, a grievously defective view of what the purpose of man's existence may be. If man can be rendered

capable of a share in the divine Life and of personal union with God, it would be strange if his entire development could be worked out under the limitations imposed by earth-conditions. Moreover, the oblivion that intervenes between incarnations, not less than the wholly mechanical nature of the sequence of cause and effect, entirely rules out all question of the development of character, and thus deprives the purpose of life of one of its noblest elements.

3. The theory is an attempt to solve a problem while omitting the chief data. The question of the immortality of the soul, and the possibility of a future life, exercised the minds of thinking men everywhere in ancient times; and the human intellect, after long grappling with it, produced a variety of hypotheses. The ancient Greek poets imagined a dim, shadowy life, gloomy and horrible, in the underworld. Later, Greek philosophers put forth, tentatively and in fanciful guise, the theory of metempsychosis, representing the souls of men and animals as being promiscuously interchangeable. The ancient Egyptians also held, in some form, a theory of re-incarnation. The Jews, a less philosophical and more religious race, found the problem too baffling for even hypothetical solution, and centred their hopes of immortality on the solidarity and continuity of the race rather than on the individual. The Indians, with a recklessness of self-confidence which almost amounts to an apotheosis of the intellect, passed from speculation to dogmatism, and devised a system of re-incarna-

tion, which they worked out in amazing detail, supported by their own peculiar contribution of the doctrine of *karma*. It is quite possible that this theory was actually the very best that could be arrived at by the unaided human intellect—at all events, it seems to have held men's minds more powerfully than any other; but the human intellect is not still unaided since the stupendous event of the Incarnation has taken place. As we saw before, in a different connection, the revelation of God, made by the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, has poured a flood of new light upon one department after another of human life and thought. We have entirely fresh data now with which to approach the question of the future life; and those who deliberately refuse these data, and limit themselves to those available twenty centuries ago, are deliberately condemning themselves to a great and avoidable ignorance.

CHAPTER IX

THE MYSTIC WAY

We are attempting to cover so much ground in this little volume—or rather to indicate so much ground that might be covered by further reading—that it is, perhaps, not necessary to apologise for embarking boldly, and in very brief space, upon another subject that has been exhaustively dealt with by recent scholars—the subject, namely, of Christian Mysticism. There is still, possibly, a vague feeling abroad that mysticism is the special property of the Orient, and is to be best pursued in an oriental, *i.e.* a non-Christian, atmosphere of thought; Christianity being supposed to be essentially a non-mystic religion. A careful study of the subject will lead to the discovery of abundant evidence to the exact opposite. When the wealth of oriental thought and temperament is brought into the Kingdom of God, we may doubtless hope for a great enrichment of the mystic consciousness; but so far, as a matter of historical fact, the influence of orientalism has always proved seriously detrimental to the development of true mysticism. Everything depends, of course, upon what we mean by the term; and it is

generally difficult for any two persons to agree upon an exact definition. Dean Inge, in preparing the way for his definition, speaks of 'that which is the raw material of all religion,' a 'dim consciousness of the *beyond*,' 'an extension of the frontier of consciousness'; and at last gives, as an alternative definition, 'the attempt to realise, in thought and feeling, the immanence of the temporal in the eternal, and of the eternal in the temporal.' These expressions are probably general enough to be acceptable to all; but when we come to analyse our conception of the eternal, we need something more definite. Dean Inge suggests 'the attempt to realise the presence of the living God in the soul and in nature.' Another writer says, 'Mysticism is the longing and striving of man to attain to a life of union with God': 'longing,' indicating the mystic temperament; 'striving,' the actual practice of mysticism.

We are not suggesting any of these definitions as in any way final: they are merely put forward as something to go upon; and, at least, they show that our conception of mysticism is bound up with our conception of God. All we are going to attempt in this chapter is to indicate, in the briefest possible outline, the way in which the goal and tendency of Christian Mysticism differ from that which is not Christian, and the stages through which it had to pass in its gradual emancipation from the trammels of non-Christian thought. Let us begin with considering, by way of sharpest contrast, the goal and tendency of the Hindu system of mystic union,

known as *yog*. The adept described in a former chapter, who had reached the end of his incarnations, was a *yogi* who had attained his goal. The nature of this goal is strictly in accordance with the Hindu philosopher's conception of the Supreme, as impersonal and unknowable. As actually realised in this life, it is a state of utter inertia of mind and body, a state as nearly approaching nothingness as is possible to living man; while, as ideally conceived, it is a state of absorption rather than of union; of loss, not of fullness of life; and the way of attainment is a continuous process of devitalisation. Dean Inge speaks of 'Oriental philosophy of the Indian type, which tries to reach the universal by wiping out all the boundary-lines of the particular, and to gain infinity by reducing self and the world to zero.'[1] It is important to remember that this condition of nothingness is the logical goal of mysticism of the negative type, based on the conception of an impersonal God, who can only be described by negatives. It is often difficult to realise the direction of tendencies, unless they can be seen in isolation. In Hinduism, we are able to see quite clearly the tendencies of the negative Way in isolation, and should therefore be able to detect them again in other systems where they are blended with those of an opposite type.

This blend of tendencies took place during several centuries, and to a very remarkable extent in Christian Mysticism, of which it has done much to obscure the real nature. In the first place,

[1] *Christian Mysticism*, p. 98.

the oriental doctrine that matter is intrinsically evil, is largely responsible for the extremes of Christian asceticism. We have seen how, in the Gnostic sects, this doctrine issued either in asceticism or in libertinism. Christian morality was proof against the latter, but it did not succeed in avoiding the inroads of the former. The first great outburst of Christian asceticism took place among the Egyptian hermits, in the third century, shortly after the end of the last great persecution. There was evidently some fear felt lest the sensuality of the pagan world should begin to invade the Church, and the hermits began the practice of asceticism as a protest against this. But it was a time when oriental influences were strong, and the idea that the body is essentially evil and must be subdued by subjecting it to severe austerities, gradually crept into the Church. 'Physical and moral austerities were pushed to an extremity which often defeated its own object, and intensified the temptations which it sought to avoid; while the idea of acquiring merit, insidiously crept in; and the moral atmosphere of the Thebaid became very different from that of the New Testament. Tennyson's picture of S. Simeon Stylites, with its strange mixture of pagan and Christian sentiment, is typical of much that may still be read in the lives of the hermits of the desert'[1]

The next invasion of Christian thought by oriental and non-Christian elements was on a still larger scale, and had a more direct bearing on the

[1] Illingworth, *Christian Character*, p. 25.

development of Christian Mysticism. It took place through the remarkable work written under the name of Dionysius the Areopagite—probably by a Syrian monk, in the fifth century. His treatises on the mystical life consist of a strange semi-pantheistic amalgam of oriental and neo-Platonic elements; and, for the better furtherance of his views, he gave his books to the world as the works of Dionysius the Areopagite, the disciple of S. Paul. It was an uncritical age; and the theologians of the day, though doubtless startled at first at finding teachings so unlike the New Testament attributed to S. Paul, were completely deceived by the imposture, and the treatises were accepted as of almost apostolic authority. For many centuries the thought of Western Christianity was saturated by this teaching, and it was long before Christian Mysticism was able to rise above its stagnating influence and pursue its own proper line of development. That it did so, and at last came into its own, is a matter for great thankfulness.

The theology of the pseudo-Dionysius is almost pure pantheism, though a certain amount of Christian phraseology is of course retained. The union which man is to strive for is presented as an immediate union with Absolute Infinite Being considered in itself without any reference to the Blessed Trinity. This Absolute Being is to be described only by negatives—no qualities can be predicated of Him; and it is only as we can succeed in stripping ourselves of qualities and passing into uncreated nothingness that we can hope to attain

to union with Him. Mystics, who taught on these lines, tried to explain how such a union was possible by saying that at the apex of man's soul there is a divine spark, which is the point at which man meets God and God man. Our aim should be to withdraw from all sentient existence into 'life at the apex,' where the soul is 'alone with the Alone.' In proportion as our life is lived at this highest point it becomes deified—in other words, we become absorbed in Absolute Being, and in that sense attain to union with God. In the theory of the divine spark, there is a distinct echo of the Gnostic teaching of the spark from the pleroma which is present in certain men, and renders them capable of redemption; and the goal of final absorption into Absolute Being is easily recognisable as one with the goal of the Hindu *yog*. The whole system is one of false mysticism, being based on an utterly false idea of God.

Another prominent idea in certain forms of mysticism was that God is immanent in nature; and hence union with God, or the Infinite, is to be sought and found through contemplation of Him as He is manifested in nature, taking the word in the popular sense to include all created things below humanity. This idea rests on the conception of nature as the expression of the thought of God, and as being, unlike man, in an unfallen state, because devoid of free will, and so of the power of resisting the Will of God. There is still the old idea of God as the Absolute, the Infinite, and of union with Him as the absorption of finite creatures

into His infinity, and the teaching still tends to pantheism; but there is a great advance on the old position that God can only be described by negatives. He does reveal Himself in part truly in nature, which is not therefore wholly evil, and He may be seen therein by the pure in heart. It is a more beautiful Way to God than the other, and one which is still advocated at the present day; but it is still incomparably lower than the Way revealed in the New Testament: it takes us a very little way towards God, and of itself tends rather to self-love than to charity.

A new note was struck in the twelfth century. To S. Bernard seems to belong the credit of being the first great mystic to recall the devotion to Christ which the first ages had known so well. He taught that the union to be aimed at is an ineffable mystical union of the soul with Christ, her bridegroom; for which it is necessary and well worth while to die to all else. After this, later saints made it impossible for the old teaching to prevail again as before, but it was long before it completely faded away: indeed, parts of it still reappear and need fresh combating from time to time. The mystic treatises at this stage of development were guide-books to a mountainous and rugged country which few have explored. The Way is full of difficulties and dangers; lonely and hard, and often dark. The traveller gradually leaves his friends behind, and, as he gets higher and higher up, becomes more and more alone; but he fixes his eyes on the end, and sees himself, some day in

the future, worn out, covered with scars, but alone on the summit in the arms of his Lord. There is much that is very beautiful in this 'living vehement desire and burning thirst in the heart' for the Bridegroom of the Soul, of which S. Bernard writes. But the taint of the old error is still there, for the way of attainment is still mainly a negative one; and it is taught that this union with Christ can only be won by the annihilation of all other affections. Many instances of this will occur to anyone familiar with medieval religious history; perhaps the extreme was reached when a Christian woman could congratulate herself on the deaths of her mother, husband, and children, on the ground that 'they were great obstacles in the way of God'; an example of supreme detachment quoted by her contemporaries with approval.

But it was for the most part the language only of the medieval mystics that was tainted with the teaching of the Negative Way. Their lives were lived on a far higher level, for their union with Christ involved their following Him in His life of service; and it must often have happened that some who in theory clung to the old idea of the goal as pure untroubled contemplation of the Beatific Vision, undisturbed by any distressing regard for the sorrows and sufferings of their fellow men, in reality spent their lives in continual service of their fellow men, whether by intercession or by active works, or both. The devoted lives of S. Theresa, S. Catherine of Siena, and many others, are a complete and

striking contrast to the existence—one can hardly call it life—of the Hindu *yogi*.

It is important to remember that for many centuries the New Testament was available for the most part only in Latin MSS., and was therefore not easily studied. Now, with our greater facilities, it has become possible to formulate, as well as follow, the stages of the Mystic Way as taught by Christ, and the nature of the union which is its goal. True mystical union is a union of wills. The Christian mystic seeks after an intense and vital union with God, manifested and expressed—that is, with Christ in His glorified humanity. As this union is attained, he learns to will what Christ wills—namely, the salvation of the world; and to do what Christ did—namely, to spend himself in the service of his fellow men. All selfishness is burned away in the fire of consuming Love: he no longer seeks anything for himself, not even the gratification which comes of the joy of union; he truly shares in the Divine Life, which is ever pouring itself out for men, and thus learns more and more to give himself unreservedly as God gives.[1]

The earlier stages of the Way are well known, and are common to many systems of mysticism. It will not be necessary now to do more than point out some of the distinctively Christian features of them.

1. The Purgative Way.—The Christian life starts with death as well as life. 'We are buried with

[1] Much of the above is derived from notes of lectures given at Barisal by the Rev. E. L. Strong.

him in baptism,' writes S. Paul; and Christian mortification consists in the gradual making effective of this 'death unto sin,' in one part after another, of our nature. 'Mortify, therefore, your members which are upon the earth.' The sins must go; and if any natural inclination or capacity, harmless in itself, has become so bound up with any sin that the two cannot be torn apart, the natural inclination or capacity must go too, even though we be crippled and mutilated in the process. 'If thy hand cause thee to stumble, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, rather than having thy two hands to go into hell,' are the words of our Lord Himself. But mutilation is not the ideal: it is a severe remedy for a worse evil; but it is not beautiful or desirable in itself. The gloomy doctrine that suffering *in itself* is meritorious, or acceptable to God, is not a Christian one. True Christian mortification has a positive, not a negative, aim. It is a means towards such training and discipline of the whole man—body, soul, and spirit—that he may be freed from the bondage of self-will and able, unhindered, to offer himself up wholly, with all his powers, in the service of God. Self-conquest is only a means to self-surrender.

The way of Purgation is the way of Penitence; and for progress in penitence, the training of the conscience is necessary. This is a fact sometimes overlooked. Some have defined conscience as the voice of God within us, and have therefore supposed that a man who follows his conscience must necessarily be doing right. This is a great mistake.

Our conscience is our own voice urging our own conception of what is right; and, without training, many of us have only a very crude idea of what is right and what is wrong. Conscience has been well likened to a ship's compass: if the instrument is damaged, or if a powerful magnet is concealed near it, the needle may be far deflected from the true pole, and the good ship steering by it may run upon the rocks. Many a man, earnestly following his conscience, has acted in a way that he has afterwards seen cause to repent of in dust and ashes. Such a one was S. Paul, in the days when he persecuted the Church of God. The conscience needs training: both that it may see things from the right point of view, and also that it may see more clearly. As the purgation of the conscience proceeds, we learn to detect many subtle sins that entirely escaped our notice when we first set foot upon the Way. Hence the Christian paradox that the greatest saint is the greatest penitent. It was at an advanced stage in discipleship that S. Paul called himself the chief of sinners.

2. The Way of Illumination.—It is important to have a clear idea of what part of us it is that is illuminated. It is not primarily the intellect. It is true that one of the seven gifts of the Spirit is 'understanding,' which is the illumination of the intellect; and when a dull and unlettered disciple has been initiated, the way in which his torpid mental faculties awake to new life as he begins to make progress on the Way is often little short of marvellous. But this is a secondary

process; and the teachers of the Negative Way were so far right in insisting that the intellect cannot here take the lead. Their mistake was in supposing that it must be suppressed altogether. The capacity in which we chiefly and primarily receive illumination is faith. Faith, in the religious sense, does not mean credulity, or mere intellectual acquiescence: it is the word we have to use, for lack of a better, for a whole range of activities on a plane higher than any attainable by ordinary human powers. There is, to begin with, the physical plane, which we can perceive by means of the five senses, and function upon by means of the body. The animals can do the same in their degree. Then there are the mental and psychic planes, where the human intellect soars far beyond the capacity of the animals to follow, though in brute force they may easily surpass us. Then, still higher, there is the spiritual plane; and the little child that has been lifted on to that, though incomparably inferior to the *savant* in intellectual power, may be engaged in activities of an altogether higher order than any known to that same *savant*. The higher faculty by which we function on this higher plane is faith, and it is primarily faith that receives enlightenment in the second stage of the Mystic Way. As the enlightenment proceeds, the disciple is able more and more clearly to become aware of God, and to know the mysteries of the Kingdom. This kind of knowledge S. Paul calls *epignosis* (ἐπίγνωσις), as though the more familiar term *gnosis* (γνῶσις) were inadequate for his purpose.

The primary knowledge which is won by faith is the knowledge of God, and to know God is to love Him ; so that ' faith worketh by love,' and the two terms are in many cases interchangeable. The blaze of glory, whose rays illuminate the soul, proceeds from the burning fire of the Love of God.

We have said that though faith works on a far higher level than the intellect, it does not annul or do violence to the intellect. On the contrary, as the soul makes its great adventures of faith, and claims continually more and more of those higher realms, reason does not fail to follow after and survey the ground as it is acquired. Faith sees by the inner light, and reason proceeds to formulate what has been seen. There is no antagonism between the two, and the intellect has its share in the illumination of the whole man. Thus the enlightened soul gradually sees all things in heaven and earth in a new and purer light : its intuitions are quickened, its vision of truth and falsehood becomes more unerring, and, not least of all, its conscience becomes still further enlightened, and its penitence deepened ; for, in the increasing radiance, it sees many faults and flaws that before escaped it. Progress on the way of illumination greatly aids progress on the way of purgation.

3. The Way of Union.—We have seen that this means a union of wills. God is Love, and Love is the eternal giving of Itself. The Way of Union has therefore been called the Way of Fecundity. This is for the Christian the final stage of the Mystic Way, and this is the way that the great

Saints trod, however mistakenly they may have thought about it. The soul which is caught up into the Love of God is filled with His life—the life of ceaseless giving; and with its will united wholly with His Will, it learns to pour itself out in the service of fellow men. Anything that is opposed to Love, hinders from the goal.

There is nothing solitary about this mystic union. It is not consummated by the individual soul, alone with its Lord. It is partially fulfilled only when each fresh soul attains to its full share in the life of the whole. The perfect consummation will be when none is left out, when the whole mystical Body of Christ, 'fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplieth,' attains at last unto 'a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.'[1] To this end there is no choice of ways. At every stage of our journey, Christ is for us the one and only Way: Christ, who on earth spent years of quiet that He might do not His own, but His Father's Will; who for this, resisted all temptations, and endured all suffering, that was necessarily caused to Him by doing His Father's Will in a sinful world; and whose constant aim was to empty Himself entirely that He might fulfil the Father's Will by becoming the Saviour of the World. Thus the Mystic Way for us means one in which we receive Christ's life more and more as time goes on, and use it not merely and chiefly to gain something

[1] For S. Paul's teaching on Christian Mysticism, *vide* especially his Epistles to the Colossians and Ephesians.

for ourselves, but to become so purged from all selfishness, and so filled with the life of Love, that we, too, may in our measure fulfil the Father's Will by becoming His instruments for the salvation of mankind. The ideal and the possible condition for us in this world is one in which we can say with Christ, ' my meat '—the satisfaction for which my whole nature craves—' is to do the Will of Him that sent me, and to accomplish His work ' ; and ' His Will ' is ' that all men should be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth ; and ' His work ' is to accomplish this.

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APPENDIX

It may happen that some will be glad of suggestions of books in which to find in brief compass some account of the Catholic Faith, or of various parts of it. The following are suggested :

The Bishop of Oxford. 'The Religion of the Church.' Mowbray. 1*s.* And other books.

W. J. Carey. 'Have you Understood Christianity?' Longmans. 2*s.*

W. J. Carey. 'A Book of Instruction for Church of England People.' Longmans. 6*d.*

The Bishop of Peterborough, and others. 'The Creed of a Churchman.' Longmans. 1*s.*

E. L. Strong. 'The Incarnation of God.' Longmans. 5*s.*

Archdeacon Holmes. 'The Church: her Books and her Sacraments.' Longmans.

A. H. McNeile, D.D. 'Self-Training in Prayer.' Heffer. 1*s.* 3*d.* And other books.

Mrs. Porter. 'The Christian Science of Prayer.' Allenson. 1*s.* 6*d.*

Dean Inge. 'Christian Mysticism.' Methuen. 12*s.* 6*d.*

J. R. Illingworth. 'Christian Character.' Macmillan. 6*d.*

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